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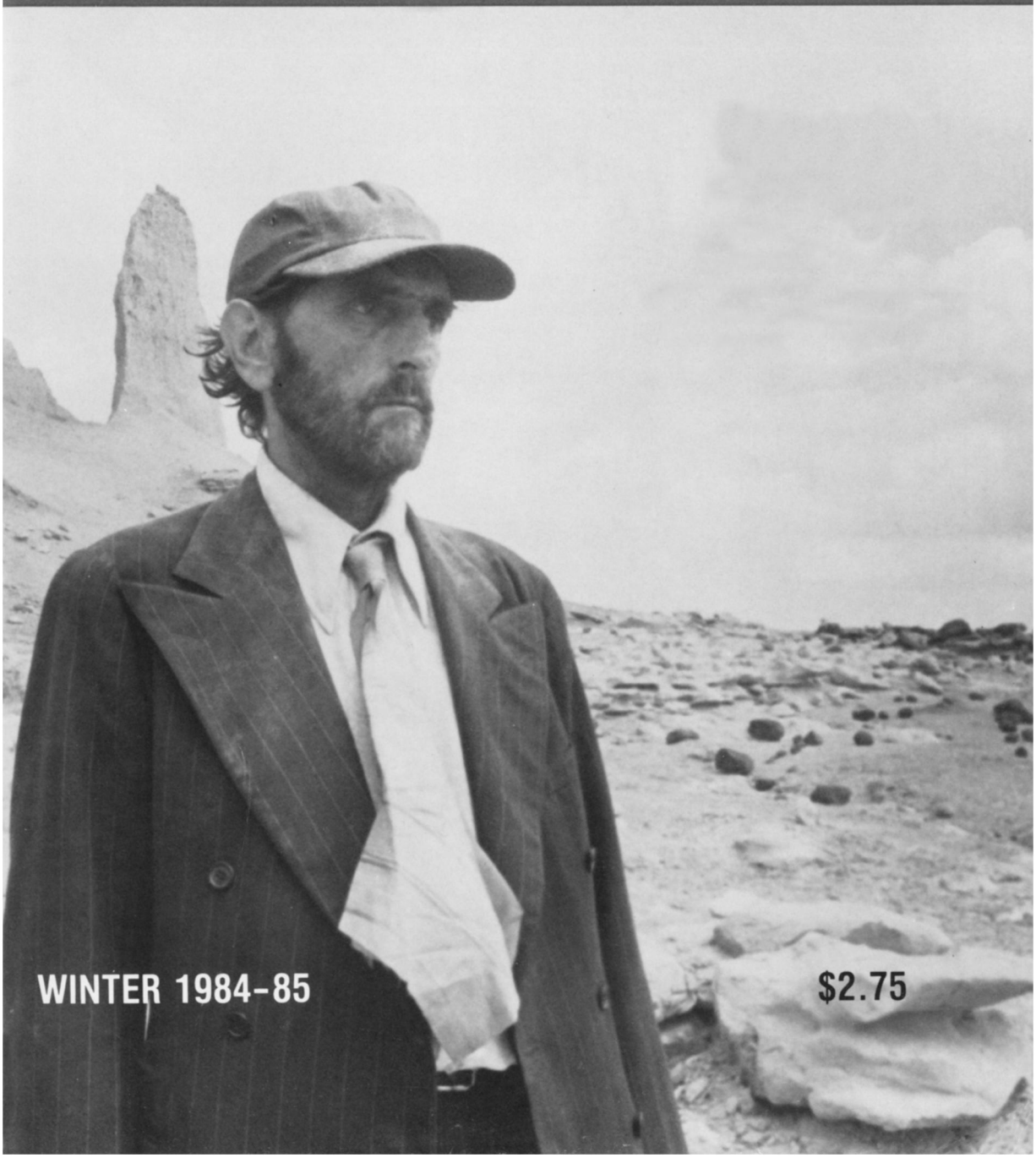

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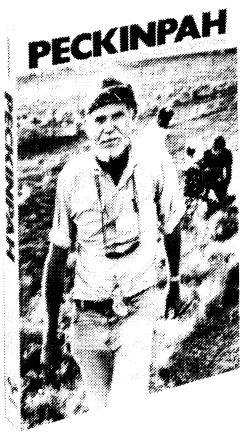

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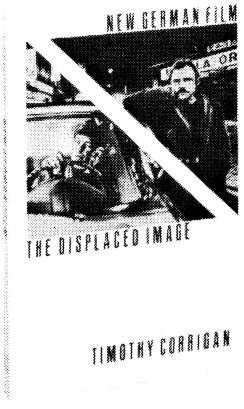

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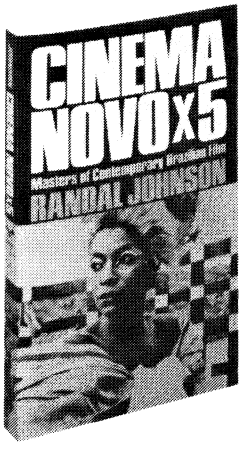

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KATHERINE DIECKMANN

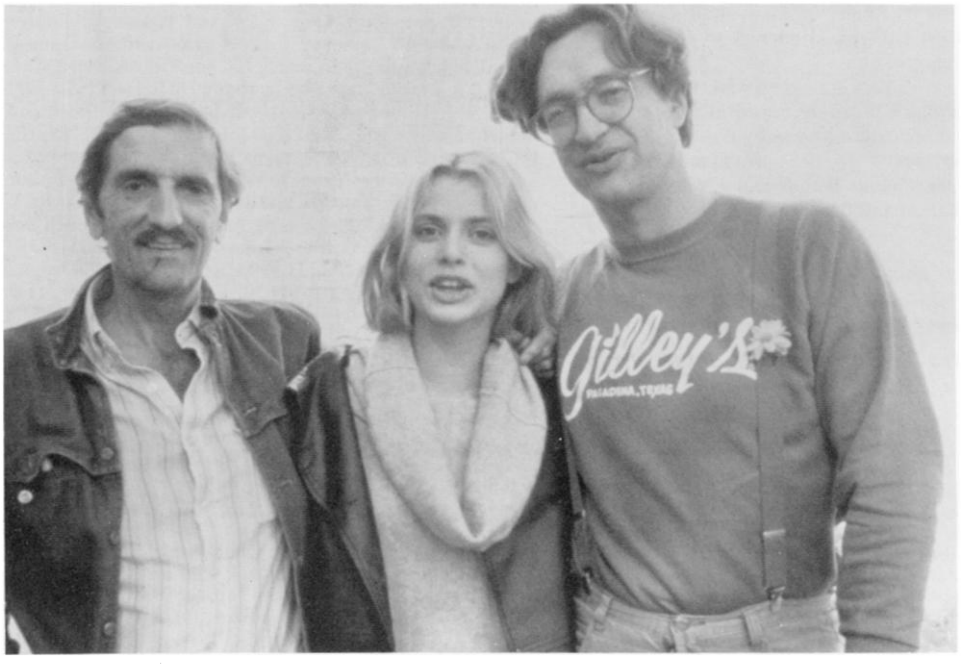
Wim Wenders

AN INTERVIEW

After ranging over death valleys, desolate highways and the disinterested skyscrapers of Houston, *Paris, Texas* comes to a halt in two tiny rooms of a peepshow palace called The Keyhole Club. There men talk to girls by phone through a one-way mirror. There Travis (Harry Dean Stanton) finds Jane (Nastassja Kinski), the wife he left mysteriously four years before—leaving, too, their young son Hunter (Hunter Carson), who has been cared for in the interim by Travis's stolid brother, Walt (Dean Stockwell) and his wife, Jane (Aurora Clemente). The sprawling roads lead to the claustrophic cubes of the club—Travis in one, Jane in the other—and through long, wrenching Sam Shepard monologues, they reconstruct the fable of their ruptured love, resolve a violent past and deliver that past over to each other to start anew.

Wim Wenders is inevitably drawn to these metaphors of the false turn and the confining chamber when he speaks of his recent career. After the road-weary successes of *Alice in the Cities, The American Friend* and *Kings of the Road,* Wenders strayed down some suspect paths. There was the much-publicized *Hammett* debacle, Wenders's sole brush with studio control and the domineering vision of Francis Ford Coppola (although at a recent screening of the film Wenders admitted that he now "sort of likes it"). In between *Hammett* shoots Wenders made *The State of Things,* a brooding, meditative "fiction" on what happens to directors and actors stranded by a producer's lie. *The State of Things* perfected the high reflexivity of *Lightning Over Water,* a portrait of dying director Nicholas Ray. And then there was the short that attempted to make sense of it all, *Reverse Angle: NYC 1982,* which depicted Wenders in conference-table struggles with Coppola over control of his "own" images.

Questioning not only his ability to see clearly enough to go on making films, but the capabilities of the international "industry" itself, Wenders shot a documentary in a Cannes hotel room in 1982. *Chambre 666* (premiering January 1985 at New York's Film Forum) fea-



Harry Dean Stanton, Nastassja Kinski, and Wim Wenders while shooting PARIS, TEXAS

tures the talking heads of Fassbinder, Herzog, Godard, Antonioni and even Spielberg, among others, pondering the crises of contemporary cinema. The ability to "manifest an immobility" in his films (as Roland Barthes once described Voltairean travel) became a constraining feature in life. Dead end.

How to break out of the box? Collaborate with America's top-ranking playwright, whose collection of short prose pieces and poems, *Motel Chronicles,* inspired the project. Bring in a musician, Ry Cooder, whose achingly lovely guitar tracks wed themselves effortlessly to cameraman Robby Müller's imagery. Rethink the career of a starlet. Urge from Stanton his finest performance to date as a shell-shocked mute who grows to the necessity of language and the problematic of love simultaneously. Call on scriptbuster L. M. Kit Carson (father of eight-year-old Hunter) to help shape the script when Shepard gets called to *Country* duty half-way through shooting and an ending has to be decided on. (Last minute credits shuffling has led to speculation that Carson wrote more of *Paris, Texas's* second half than was originally thought, which is either a compliment to him or an insult depending on how patient you are with the film's shifted pace and slow wind-down.) While detractors have charged *Paris, Texas* with falling into aimlessness once Travis and Hunter strike out for Los Angeles—leaving Walt, Anne and their plot complication behind—the film is indeed Wenders's "breakthrough" (signaled in part by the awarding of the 1984 Camera d'Or Prize at Cannes): he retreats from brooding existential males and self-referential indulgences in favor of a strong narrative that shifts from story to fable, from wry exposition to poignancy. This is not a wrong move.

There is a split in Paris, Texas, *perhaps because of Sam Shepard's departure. Before the father and son leave LA, the tone and even certain episodes are similar to your earlier films. Then the story line and mood change.*

The first part is about the two brothers, which is something I've done before (not brothers but two men) and which Sam has done before—*True West* is almost that story. We knew we were starting this movie on common, solid ground, but we also knew that the movie would really happen after this. From our first one-page outline, we knew the movie was Travis and Jane, and we had to take Travis to that point, and *ourselves* to that point, and face a story neither of us had told before. We had to get there slowly. I don't think there's a break; at some point in the middle, the movie turns and starts walking on new territory, like in a blank space in the landscape. At least *my* landscape.

You show your characters crying, revealing explicit emotion, which is something quite new. Were you ever frightened of becoming too sentimental?

Sentimentality, of course, is a danger: it's the other side of emotion, a perversion of emotion, right? I don't think we crossed that line. I trusted Harry Dean very much in that. Most of my earlier characters were Travises in a way—you could call all of them Travis. Travis is less afraid than those guys. Or more desperate. He knows he has to go further, and I knew I had to go further, and not tell another story of a guy who's unable to face his emotions, or his love, or his longings. With the two guys in *Kings of the Road,* for example, which is also a movie about love, you feel that's what they're longing for and they can't face it.

Travis is different, though, in that he doesn't have a veneer of "cool" about him. He has a strong childlike quality, particularly at first, and this seems to allow his relationship with his son to develop. Both are receptive and imaginative.

We chose Harry Dean because he has that in him. He's one of the few adults I know who is not afraid of that challenge and has kept the child that's dead in most adults, and certainly a lot of actors, with him. He has an innocence about him, despite a long career and being 58 years old. In *Paris, Texas* he and Hunter change roles: sometimes you find Travis in the position of the child and his son as the adult.

Stanton also has a subliminal violence which remains inarticulated, except in the story he tells Jane about their life together. It's never shown, only spoken.

He's said goodbye to that violence. He's suffered too much himself from that violence. Most men don't succeed in ever putting a lid on it; a lot of men at some point don't see their way out of the hole they're in except to use

violence, especially toward women. In the end Travis realizes he's caused too much pain with his violence and there's no way to say it didn't happen. It happened, he realizes it, and he's missed his chance because of it.

Originally you'd planned to have Walt and Anne follow Travis and Hunter—one of several plot options, another of which, I understand, was to have Nastassja Kinski's character have a terribly mean preacher father, who was going to be played by John Huston. Anne has a maternal and almost condescending attitude toward Travis, which is left suspended. But you'd written a scene where Travis and Anne have a violent confrontation—

She senses from the moment Travis comes in the door that he's endangering the little world she's built up around her. She's accepted Hunter as her son, with all the schizophrenia involved, but four years is a long time to live with a little boy. So Travis is an opponent from the beginning. And she thinks she's found a way out by giving Travis the only clue she has about Jane. Her thought is he'll go and leave everything as it was. The scene we didn't shoot was Anne and Walt following Travis and Hunter and catching up with them in the middle of Arizona. Anne really fights Travis over Hunter, and it's finally stopped by Walt, who realizes it's Hunter's decision to go look for his mother, and accepts it. It was a really beautiful scene, but we had neither the time nor the money to pursue it.

In Peter Handke's Weight of th World *there's a fragment written about the time of* American Friend *which seems to describe a shot in the film, about suicide and gazing into the sky. With* Motel Chronicles, *there are specific images: the plastic dinosaur, the piece about the man sitting in a pasture at night midway between Los Angeles and San Francisco, which captures the suspended feeling of the film.*

Travis and his son Hunter: PARIS, TEXAS

I read *The Weight of the World* at the time of *American Friend* and it's a book you can carry with you, open up to any page, and you have someone to talk to. *Motel Chronicles* is a similar book. There's another piece in *Motel Chronicles* with a guy standing on the side of a highway, looking at his crushed suitcase, trying to figure out if he should keep anything from it, and in the end he just sets fire to the thing and walks straight into the desert. And maybe that's where we started *Paris, Texas,* with that image.

Paris, Texas *is kind of a mystery, and seems to follow Peter Wollen's idea about Hitchcockian narratives being quest narratives, propelled by a search for an object or value. The film is specific to Nastassja Kinski and is centered on her practically from the start. With* The Goalie's Anxiety at the Penalty Kick, Wrong Move, American Friend, Kings of the Road, *there's no such locus and the films are most interested in disorientation. Structure is very apparent here.*

That's what made me like the story, the direction from the beginning—a very straight line. For once I was making a movie that wasn't meandering all over the place. That's what Sam brought to this movie of mine as an American writer: forward movement, which is very American in a way. I've always liked that movement and have always found myself incapable of doing it. Even with *American Friend.* I thought, "Great, we have this story by Patricia Highsmith, it's going to take us somewhere." But it never did. It went sideways, all over the place.

Is it because of collaborating with Handke?

It's something very European—or German. So far, yes, it has a lot to do with Peter Handke.

You deliberately contrast the open desert with the populated, LA desert.

Houston is more the opposite image to the desert in the beginning. With LA we tried to make it look like any Midwestern city—just nowhere. One thing about *Paris, Texas* from beginning to end—and this was true for each and every shot—was that we never thought of anything we'd seen before.

That seems quite impossible.

It's possible as an attitude. Of course there's a certain amount of imagery that has passed into the subconscious, and the very second you have a frame and you're shooting, either in the desert or in the city, it would be pretentious to say this is something that hasn't been done before. We always tried to see just what was there and find a way to show it that corresponded to what was in front of us, not some notion of what we were reminded. of. I'm talking about avoiding an attitude of quoting, and of knowing you're quoting something.

Wasn't that interrogation of quotation part of your project in Chambre 666?

None of the respondents really answered to that question. I tried to answer it myself with *Paris, Texas.* I knew at the end of *The State of Things* there was no other way out for me. I had to look at what I was trying to tell and tell it without trying at the same time to reflect the way I was telling it. That was the dead end *The State of Things* represented. It was so self-conscious, reflecting its own conditions. You can do that for one film—and I did it very radically with *The State of Things*—but after that there's no point to take it to. Except to say, "Now there's a totally white canvas." Robby [Müller] and I didn't look at a single film, picture or painting for *Paris, Texas,* whereas we looked at Walker Evans before doing *Kings of the Road* and Edward Hopper before doing *American Friend.* I didn't have one book with me, which is rare. We didn't even try to make little drawings the night before shooting.

There's always been an almost clichéd interest on your part in American rock and roll, jukeboxes, pinball. In Paris, Texas *that's all absent, replaced by the purity of Ry Cooder's music which draws on American musical idioms.*

There was no other music because there was no need for it. Ry did what I was dreaming he could do: combine. In all my other films there was both rock and roll and the score. They complemented each other, but there were these two different levels of music. In *Paris, Texas* there is one, and that one is so much closer to all the images than any music I've worked with before. It's almost as if the music is coming out of these landscapes.

About Nastassja Kinski: in the majority of her roles since Wrong Move [*Kinski's first film, made with Wenders in 1974*] *her image seems to have been used. In* Paris, Texas *it is withheld until the very end of the film—there's that agonizing scene when Travis talks to Jane from his booth and stares at the floor, and we're waiting and waiting for him to look so we can look and see her, too, but he's not looking. Do you feel there's a difficulty in showing her because of the way people perceive her, as a nymphet?*

Dean Stockwell and Harry Dean Stanton in PARIS, TEXAS

Yes, that's why my first idea for the part was her and why I never had any other idea for it. It has to do with a subtext in the movie, which is a man insisting on a certain image of a woman. And I felt that Nastassja was so right for this movie because people who come to see it will prepare to see an image of her that's been made. In a way they must go through the same thing Travis goes through. That's how the peepshow came up: Travis is sitting in front of a screen, and she's on the screen, or behind it, and is really the object of his imagination. I've followed Nastassja's career and seen her films and some of them were painful to me because I felt there was someone who was trapped. There's a really great actress, and she's totally exploited because of her image. That was also a reason to ask her, because I felt she was waiting to show the other side of that image. And she did.

Chambre 666 *is being released soon. What are the problems involved in trying to make "personal" films (your film diary projects, for instance, the one on Ozu) while staking your claim in the market?* Paris, Texas *has been hyped much more than your other films,*

what with the book, and because of Cannes.*

I fought hard to be in the position I'm in now. After the problems of the past few years, I got to the point where the only way out for me was to get a camera, walk down the street and just look at things. For one thing, the narrative has always been such a . . . romantic block, such a *problem.* I started out as a painter and some of that has survived in me. And I've always thought that films—the very thing, movies—have been invented in the first place to witness the twentieth century. I've always been very attracted to documentaries, but have always thought that feature films are in a way the true documents of our time. Especially when they're outrageous fantasies, like, let's say, Hitchcock's *Vertigo.* If somebody 500 years from now happened to find *Vertigo,* they'd have a pretty clear notion of what America looked like in 1958. This is a very important component of film-making: even if a film is sheer fantasy—film is unique because no other form can do that—it's also a document of the time it was made. And I do like straight documentaries a lot. Though it's something of a lost form, because television has taken over so much. But I think it's extremely healthy, a kind of therapy for anyone who tries to tell stories, to go out and have nothing to tell, no story, no fiction, and try to find the right way to represent something. I very much insist that this is part of my work.

Many film-makers who formerly made experimental shorts now want to make features, forsaking the personal form for the feature format. And features are thought of as being exclusive from shorts.

A writer can write novels, like Peter Handke, and at the same time write something like *The Weight of the World,* which is strictly little notes. Or *Motel Chronicles.* It's ridiculous to say, "Now I'm a writer, I only write novels." It's really hilarious that film-makers are constrained that way. Especially with the very term "avant-garde." I don't know what to do with that. *Vertigo* to me is avant-garde; we can forget a lot of what is called "avant-garde" in seeing *Vertigo,* which is really courageous and daring. A lot of what's called "avant-garde" is gratuitous.

In making Chambre 666, *did you feel strongly that film is in jeopardy as an art form? Do you watch MTV, and what do you think of that vulgarization of editing and its effect on film's integrity as a method?*

I was badly addicted to MTV when it first went on 24 hours in California a few years ago. MTV happened so necessarily and obviously, no one can do a thing about it. It's nothing but publicity and the whole form of publicity has taken over more and more. It's taken over music from the radio. It's just another step towards a total inflation of imagery, to a point where people lose a feeling of integrity, of truth in images. That's publicity—trying to tell people lies about a product. Godard says that in *666.* Among other things, he says, "In any one-minute ad you're trying to tell people lies about whatever product. It can't be longer than one minute because if it were, people would start feeling they're being told lies. If any attempt to sell a car or cigarettes were ten minutes long, people would certainly no longer buy them."

Kit Carson has said of Paris, Texas *that what Travis comes back with from the desert is "the truth," and you seem to agree with that. The categories in the film are clear and there's a strong sense of closure—although Travis is moving out of the last frame. I can't imagine saying one character has "the truth" in any of your other films, that one character brings it to the film, or, as you've said, delivers over truthful love to two other people in a rather absolute way, then leaves. It seems a radical departure.*

It was a necessity. It was really necessary for me to get to that point.

Particularly after the experience of making Hammett?

After *Hammett, Lightning Over Water, The State of Things.*

Do you see those films as leading up to something together?

I couldn't have considered making *Paris, Texas* without any of those dead ends before. Because each and every one of those movies at the end led to a point where you can only return and say "This was not the way out." Each for its own reasons. And all of them were *movies.* It was not like starting with a

*Ecco Press just has published a 500-page book on *Paris, Texas,* complete with full screenplay and sumptuous color plates, for, as the press release puts it, "fans of Sam Shepard, Nastassja Kinski and Wim Wenders."

Jane (Nastassja Kinski) finds that the man on the line is her estranged husband Travis.

different material—it was still a camera and film and an effort to believe in fiction.

Paris, Texas *doesn't contain your* self *in the same way, except for that ironic moment early on when you walk out of the frame. Perhaps that gets back to not wanting to quote. Not wanting to quote yourself.*

There is a more overall view which is the situation of movies, of film-making now, in 1984. And of course there is a 60- or 70-year history. I've made quite a number of films that were more concerned with reflecting themselves than reflecting anything that exists apart from movies. And you can call that life, or truth, or whatever. Reality. Doesn't matter. I mean, all those forbidden words. And I see lots of movies and was getting frustrated not only by my own work and the reflexiveness of it but with other movies, too, because it seemed there was no more way out. Whatever film you went to see, it had its nourishment or its life or its food, its roots, in other movies. In movies. I didn't see anything anymore that was really trying to redefine a relation between life and images made from life. Whatever you go to see these days, you sit there and after some time you realize that you're involved again in something that was born and has been recapitulating an experience that comes from other movies. And I think that's a really serious dead end for something that I love very much, which is movies. And I did my share of that. *Paris, Texas* was —I wouldn't say desperate, because I wasn't so desperate while I was making it—but at the end of *The State of Things,* there was no other choice than to redefine, or find again, or rediscover what this is: to film something that exists, and film something that exists quite apart from movies.

JAMES NAREMORE

Film and the Performance Frame

If we take a professional actor, . . . to film him through the "Kino-eye" would be to show the agreement or disagreement between the man and the actor . . . Not Petrov in front of you, but Ivanov playing the role of Petrov.

—DZIGA VERTOV, 1919

Imagine for a moment that a short film I am about to describe was shot by some Los Angeles-based Dziga Vertov, a man with a movie camera setting out to record an incident on the streets. (The illusion will be dispelled almost immediately.)

The date was early 1914. In Venice, California, next door to Santa Monica, the citizens were staging a soap-box derby, and a director and his cameraman assistant went out to catch some of the action, bringing along a second crew that would take pictures of them at work. They were well prepared to get candid footage, and everything was set up correctly to demonstrate a dialectic between life and the camera. All they had to do was undercrank and overcrank a few shots, and then head back to their studio to photograph the process of editing; the documentary material would be cut together with scenes of the film-makers at work, producing a conflict between the camera as recording instrument and the camera as instrument of semiosis. But almost from the beginning something went wrong. To be precise, an actor got in the way.

A brief account of the film's opening scenes will illustrate what happened. It begins with a newsreel-style shot of the main street in Venice, with the camera positioned beside the roadway, looking diagonally across at a crowd of spectators. We see a couple of officials dressed in dark suits and lots of kids in knickers, a few of them scrambling across the street in the far distance. In the center of the image is a soap-box race car, its driver at the ready, being pushed by hand across a starting line. But contemporary viewers can hardly register this information; they immediately notice a man at the far left, standing a bit out from the crowd, his back to the camera, silhouetted against the bright sky. He is wearing a derby hat, a tight Edwardian coat, and baggy pants; he stands in a dancer's first position, the toes of his shoes pointed up like wings, and he is holding a curved-handled, bamboo walking stick.

As the soapbox racer rolls off to the right, he turns to watch it go, and we glimpse his face. He is more unkempt and mean-looking than the poetic fellow we know from later appearances, with a rather large nose, bushy brows, and a scruffy moustache. He seems to be drunk—his hair is sticking out beneath the bowler, he is weaving a little and puffing madly at a cigarette. When the car passes, he wanders into the roadway, partly blocking the camera's view of the race. Somebody taps him on the back. He tips the bowler apologetically, but turns toward us, walking a half dozen jerky, turned-out paces along the curb until he is in the exact center of the composition, now completely blocking the view of a second car which has been rolled up to the starting line. He turns and stands for a moment, his back once more to the camera, his hat tilted at a raffish angle, and then suddenly spins around as if he had been yelled at by the cameraman. Looking toward us and frowning, he points a dainty finger offscreen right, responding to a "direction." Hurrying to go, he stays, shifting from foot to foot, clearly aware that he is being photographed. He then makes a quick right face and marches off, knees locked and toes pointed out. For a moment we glimpse a race car passing the starting line, but then, as if pulled by an invisible rubber band, the bowler-hatted figure pops back into the picture, looking into the camera. Fascinated, he pauses at the edge of the frame, gazing at us, twirling his cane in feigned nonchalance, and then exits.

After a brief shot of the race in progress, we see a title card, "The Grand Stand," fol-

lowed by a slow pan along a reviewing box, with a line of seated figures and a few rows of people standing behind. Several faces are smiling shyly, glancing sidelong at the camera with the tense pose of people who are trying to ignore it. The panorama is fascinating—boys in tight collars and walking caps, grizzled men and plain women; but suddenly, there, at the bottom corner of the picture, sitting on the curb alongside a grubby child, is the fellow from the previous scene. An unlit cigarette in his mouth, he is looking off to the left, ostentatiously oblivious. As the panning movement continues, he casually stands up, blocking the view and sauntering along with the camera until he has moved clean out into the street. Apparently somebody yells at him again, because he looks toward the lens, gesturing to the right and then the left, pretending to be confused about where he should exit, all the while remaining at center stage.

By now the director (Henry Lehrman) has had enough. He walks briefly into the picture, shoves the intruder off, and then ducks behind the camera, which continues to pan. But the drunken tramp pops back, staring indignantly in our direction. The director returns and pushes him out of the picture again. Again he bounces back, easing along, pausing to raise a leg and strike a match on his pants. The camera has now moved a full 180 degrees and is aimed at the opposite side of the road.

In the background a couple of dogs are circling at the edge of the crowd, sniffing one another; a few boys are craning their necks to watch the race and a few others are laughing, amused by the antics in front of the camera. As if inspired, the drunk now begins showing off: he lights his cigarette, shakes out the match, flicks it over his shoulder, and does a fancy little dance kick with his heel, bouncing the dead match away before it has hit the road.

The film is only about four minutes long, and it consists of nothing more than this single gimmick, repeated over and over. The "drunk" keeps hamming it up for the camera, growing ever more aggressive and determined to ignore the director. When the camera crew tries to photograph the end of the race, he comes running and skipping down the middle of the street, flapping his arms like a bird, tripping over the finish line; when stray kids wander between him and the camera, he shoves them in the face; when the director starts knocking him out of the way, he dances around in little circles at the periphery of the shot and sticks out his tongue. Ultimately he "spoils" every scene in the newsreel.

He is of course Charlie Chaplin, and the film is *Kid Auto Races at Venice,* a minor landmark in cinema history because it is the first film in which Chaplin appeared in the costume of the Tramp. When it is viewed in the light of Chaplin's later career, it becomes fascinating in many ways. For example, the pretended battle between Charlie and the director can be read prophetically, as an ironic dramatization of Chaplin's egocentricity, his determination to become a star and control every aspect of his films. (There was in fact a real-life conflict between Chaplin and director Henry Lehrman, who is described in Chaplin's autobiography as a "vain" fellow, given to leaving the actor's best work on the cutting-room floor. Significantly, Chaplin describes an entirely different film as the one where he first wore the famous costume, and conveniently forgets that Lehrman was directing when the Tramp was born.[1]) As I've already suggested, it can also be read as an allegory about the way the cinema tended to center on actors, relegating Vertov's Kino-eye to a secondary importance behind filmed versions of nineteenth-century theatrics. Where my own subject is concerned, however, *Kid Auto Races* is especially interesting because it makes a structural use of two modes of performance, establishing a fundamental distinction which is important to the analysis of performance in general.

Like a great many of the early comedies produced by Mack Sennett, this small film involves a comic "turn" played off against life in the streets. Its humor and aesthetic pleasure depend on the fact that audiences eventually recognize Chaplin as an *actor,* distinguishable from the "real" people behind him. The paradox here is that the people in the background are performing, too—not only the soap-box drivers in the race, which is a performed event, but the kids who scurry across the street and gawk into the camera, unwittingly providing a true version of Chaplin's mock hammyness. Everybody plays a role, from the stolid men who stand with hands in their pockets, pretending the camera isn't there, to the woman in a Victorian bonnet, seated in the reviewing stand and covering her face with a sheet of paper so as not to be photographed. The difference between Chaplin and those others is that his performance is a clever professional mimesis, staged for the camera, whereas theirs is an everyday response, provoked by the camera or caught unawares. Chaplin's performance is theatrical, and theirs is aleatory.

Kid Auto Races illustrates how the distinction between theatrical and aleatory events can be thrown into sharp relief, and the audi-

ence can be invited to take pleasure in the difference between acting and accident. The technique derives not from cinema but from a very old tradition of street-corner mime which still survives today. I have seen a grease-painted and distinctly Chaplinesque clown create a show by standing across from people at a sidewalk cafe, designating some of his watchers as "audience," others as participants. First he mimicked a traffic cop, lining up bystanders on the other side of the street; having cleared a sort of corridor, he began performing on the sidewalk, slipping in behind innocent passersby and playing jokes with them. He could even move the playing area, drawing some of his audience into the spectacle by crossing the street and sitting at one of the sidewalk tables—where, for example, he tried to pick up a pretty girl. By means of his costume and his elaborate gestures, he was able to establish what the social scientist Erving Goffman calls a conceptual or cognitive "frame," bestowing a special performing significance on all the people or objects that came inside.[2] Ultimately, his show demonstrated that all social life is a kind of performance; after all, he was simply exaggerating the role-playing that was already happening on the street, turning it into theater.

The early semiotic theorists in the Prague Circle emphasized the degree to which this sort of theatrical transformation happens in any exchange between a performer and an audience. A more recent writer on the subject, Kier Elam, has described the "first principle" of Prague theory as the observation that anything designated a stage or playing area tends to "suppress the practical function of phenomena in favor of a symbolic or signifying role, allowing them to participate in dramatic representation."[3] In the simpler words of Jiri Veltrusky, "All that is on the stage is a sign."[4] Thus, given the fact that cinema makes all the world a potential stage or performing frame, even a dog who is going about his doggy business (like the canines on a Venice street in *Kid Auto Races*) can become a player.

Nevertheless the primary frame which designates spectacle can contain various kinds of performance, and the audience does not usually regard dogs in the same way as humans. We commonly make a distinction between "real people" and actors, but we also assign the purely theatrical performers to different registers of dramatized action. To choose a recent example, when the characters portrayed by John Forsythe and Linda Evans were married on an episode of the television show *Dynasty,* Peter Duchin was the pianist at their wedding reception. Forsythe and Evans walked over and said hello to Duchin, using his real name, and he in turn congratulated them on their wedding, using their fictional names. On an earlier episode of the same show, Henry Kissinger appeared as Henry Kissinger—roughly like Napoleon showing up in an historical novel, except that Kissinger was really there, playing himself, the way John Wayne and William Holden once played themselves on *I Love Lucy.* This suggests that people in a film can be regarded in at least three different senses: as actors playing theatrical personages, as public figures playing theatrical versions of themselves, and as documentary evidence. If the term "performance" is defined in its broadest sense, it covers the last category as much as the first: when people are caught unaware by a camera, they become objects to be looked at, and they usually provide evidence of role-playing in everyday life; when they know they are being photographed, they become role-players of another sort.

Technically at least, *Kid Auto Races* contains all these basic kinds of performance, with Chaplin playing a character, the director Lehrman playing a director, and the crowd simply fulfilling their role as the anonymous masses in a newsreel. Notice, however, that the Lehrman role does not actually qualify as a different type of performance because he is not enough of a celebrity for us to recognize him. (True celebrity performance does not make its way into Hollywood movies until a couple of years later, in 1916, when Chaplin appeared as a cameo in one of Bronco Billy Anderson's Essanay pictures; in the same year Anderson reciprocated by doing a walk-on as "himself" in a Chaplin short.[5]) Even the distinction between Chaplin and the bystanders (who could have been carefully trained actors) depends largely on the way *Kid Auto Races* is received, because in the last analysis the aleatory quality of any film has less to do with how it was actually made than with what

happens in an audience's minds. In Godard's *Breathless* (1960), for example, there is a moment when Jean Seberg and Jean-Paul Belmondo are holding a conversation in a bedroom, and the sound of an ambulance siren on the street outside covers up a line of their dialogue. Because the siren has no apparent function in the scene, and because it disrupts certain conventions of theatrical representation, it seems as natural as Raoul Coutard's "light of day" photography. As a result of such details, the acting seems partly improvised, and the myth has grown up that Godard's sound tracks are "unmixed." In fact, however, the siren could have been added in the recording studio and no one would have been the wiser; the aleatory quality of the film depends on the way our awareness has been "keyed" or coded by the film-maker.

The point about *Kid Auto Races* is simply that it allows, even encourages its audience to recognize a difference between Chaplin and the bystanders. The makers of the film assume our familiarity with streetcorner life, our knowledge of how people behave when they are photographed, and our awareness of a certain type of early documentary which they have parodied. Where Chaplin is concerned, he does certain things to notify us that he is a man pretending to be a drunken showoff rather than the thing itself. First of all he is a costumed figure, even if his clothing initially makes him blend with the crowd. On closer inspection, it becomes apparent that no one else in Venice, California, on that day was wearing a bowler hat, a frock coat, or an Edwardian collar. Looked at still more closely, his dress speaks to us in a systematic, orderly language which is very different from the haphazard dialect of everyday life. In a famous passage of his autobiography he says he chose this outfit because "I wanted everything a contradiction"[6]—thus he is part tramp, part gentleman, with coat too tight and pants too baggy; his scruffy moustache indicates that he is a rascal, but dark make-up brings out the liveliness and sensitivity in his eyes; a bowler hat and cane give him dignity, but oversize shoes make him a clown. At every level his costuming is built on a set of formal contrasts which signify that he is an art object, a figure who says, "I am an actor."

The same message is communicated by his position in the frame and his movements. Despite the fact that the director is supposed to be avoiding Charlie, *Kid Auto Races* is never allowed to become a decentered modernist film, nor a casual documentary. Much of its pleasure and comedy derive from Chaplin's ability to imitate and exaggerate a type of everyday performance, occupying a space on the screen which denotes theatrical interest. He is drawn to that area like a metal filing to a magnet, wandering off with great reluctance or being shoved out of view only to come jogging back. (At one point, infatuated with cinema and determined to ignore the director, he stands looking straight into the camera with haughty, chin-up dignity, and wiggles his eyebrows.) Although he imitates a man whose entrances and exits are inappropriate, we can sense his almost uncanny comic timing. No matter how often he trips or falls, we know it is an act; despite the apparent foolishness of his character, he moves with theatrical eloquence, never using the transparent gestures of offstage communication. He walks with an eccentric, ballet dancer's waddle, feet splayed to the side and arms jauntily swinging. He turns on his toes, once or twice executing a perfect pirouette. He never simply stands, he *poses*. When he pretends to be a man who is pretending the camera isn't there, he does so with an exaggerated nonchalance, or with the intense gaze of an explorer preoccupied with something on the far horizon. Even when the director shoves him down in the street he somersaults, never losing his hat, cane, or pretended dignity, and snaps upright to resume his position.

Perhaps all theatrical performance (even the naturalism of actors like Spencer Tracy and Robert Duvall) involves a certain degree of ostensiveness that marks it off from quotidian behavior. Chaplin, however, was the most brilliantly ostentatious actor in the history of movies, so intent on exhibiting the virtuosity of theatrical movement that he is nearly always more stylized and poetically unnatural than the people he plays alongside. In this sense his work differs from the general run of movies, which do not make sharp contrasts between codes and styles of performance. Even today, when most films are shot on location, there is seldom any attempt to foreground theatricality by setting it off

against accidental or found material. And although we recognize a difference between John Forsythe and Henry Kissinger, that is only because we know them from the media; both men have modeled their behavior on the effortless, transparent manner of everyday life. In fact the dramatic film has always fostered a neutral, "invisible" form of acting, so that highly theatrical techniques—Chaplin's mime, Dietrich's expressionist posing—are distinct exceptions to the rule.

This is, however, a type of modernism—Brechtian or Pirandellian in its inspiration—which neither foregrounds the actor's gesture nor allows conventional transparency to go unexamined. Instead of making a clear demarcation between theatrical and aleatory codes, this sort of film problematizes the relationship between actors, roles, and audiences, sometimes confounding the audience's ability to "frame" or "key" the action on the screen. *Breathless* is a case in point. A movie about the connection between roles played on film and roles played on the street, it casts Belmondo and Seberg self-reflexively, photographing them in quasi-documentary style. More than that, it requires them to imitate characters who imitate movie stars, and who borrow their dialogue from the *roman policier;* thus a great many of Belmondo's gestures become allusions, and his otherwise naturalistic performance evokes Brecht's notion that an actor should always behave as if he were quoting.[7] Sometimes, too, Belmondo's work is deliberately set off against what appears to be aleatory material. Near the end of the film he staggers away from the camera, histrionically clutching a wound in the style of countless Hollywood gangster movies; as he struggles for a ridiculously long way down a street, we can see pedestrians on the sidewalk, going about their business or looking at his performance like bystanders watching a movie. The sequence echoes a technique we have seen earlier, when Belmondo and Seberg stroll down the Champs Elysées, surrounded by people who turn to watch them or who glance at the camera. The effect here is slightly different from *Kid Auto Races,* because Godard has clearly introduced extras into the crowd—as when a Seberg lookalike does a double take as she walks past the actress; at other moments, chiefly on the margins of the screen, it becomes impossible to distinguish actual pedestrians from actors, and theater and life seem to intersect.

Jean-Paul Belmondo in BREATHLESS: *the self as an outgrowth of performance*

Godard's deliberate confusion of theatrical and aleatory codes serves to undermine the conventional notion of filmed performance. Unlike *Breathless,* the typical dramatic film regards acting as an artful imitation of unmediated behavior in the real world. The actor is taken to be an already completely formed person who learns to "think" for the camera. Thus a substantial body of intelligent critical writing has described the performances of the classic stars as if they were little more than fictional extensions of the actor's true personalities,[8] and in America the most celebrated postwar theater actors were actually *schooled* in how to perform themselves. "We believe," wrote Lee Strassberg, "that the actor need not imitate a human being. The actor is himself a human being and can create out of himself."[9] Strassberg's reification of the self was so crucial to his thinking that "Method" training often extended to a kind of psychological therapy. An actor, he wrote, "can possess technical ability to do certain things and yet may have difficulty expressing them because of his emotional life. The approach to this actor's problem must therefore deal first with whatever difficulties are inherent in himself that negate his freedom of expression and block the capacities he possesses."[10] Not surprisingly, the Method-trained actors—many of whom adapted well to Hollywood—all had an introspective, neurotic style, vastly different from Chaplin's open theatricality.

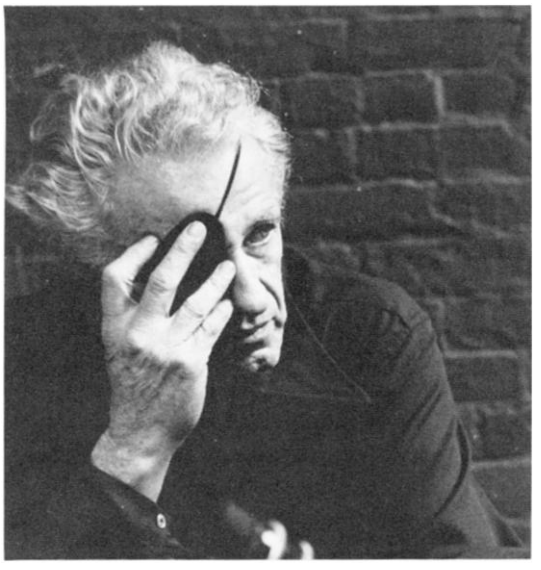
A film like *Breathless,* for all its rough-and-ready appearance, tends to reverse such assump-

tions. Instead of treating performance as an outgrowth of an essential self, it implies that the self is an outgrowth of performance. "Performance," in turn, is understood in its broadest, most social sense, as the thing we do when we interact with the world—a concept embracing not only theater but public celebrity and everyday life. In its own brief, modest, and quite different way, *Kid Auto Races* has similar implications: after all, comic theatrical performance has always been designed to expose and make fun of our social roles, and Chaplin was one of its masters.

Still another approach, in some ways like Godard but in others more complex and contradictory, may be seen in Wim Wenders's *Lightning Over Water* (1981). Conceived as a sort of tribute to Nicholas Ray, it began as a thinly fictionalized, collaborative work based on the real-life relationship between two directors; but as Ray's disastrously failing health grew worse, the film was transformed into a self-conscious mix of theatricality, celebrity acting, and aleatory happening—a drama in which the leading player very nearly performs his own death. An extreme instance, it may help complete and summarize the themes I have been discussing.

To emphasize a symbiosis between life and art, Wenders and his collaborators structured their work as a Pirandellian regression, employing a radical mixture of techniques which pay homage to Ray's last film, an unclassifiable piece entitled *We Can't Go Home Again.* Instead of producing a *cinéma-vérité* documentary or a set of interviews with Ray, they staged "true-life" scenes, occasionally shooting in *noir* style; alternatively, they recorded their own activity, often videotaping themselves with a Betamax. Throughout, the performances are so naturalistic, so much grounded in the actual situation, that we cannot distinguish what was planned from what was accidental—for example, near the beginning of the film we suddenly cut to a videotaped segment showing the preparation for a scene we have been watching: "Do you want this to be like *acting,* Wim?" Ray asks. "No, not at all," Wenders replies. Ray reclines weakly on a bed, coughing and gazing blankly into space, just as he has done in the "theatrical" sequence we have just seen.

By such means *Lightning Over Water* indicates the way everyday behavior overlaps with theater, and it also points to the social formation of personality, because the very process of working on the picture has created a role for Ray to act out.[11] At the same time it documents his suffering—revealing the signs of his cancer, filming him in an actual hospital bed, allowing miscues or other signs of the aleatory to break into scenes that have been rehearsed. Its chief strategy is to give Ray's performance an unstable, vulnerable, or ambiguous conceptual frame. Initially it creates a theatrical context for people to play "themselves," but as Ray's illness worsens, it allows normally out-of-frame activity to intrude upon illusion, making drama out of the way biology disrupts art.



The dying Nick Ray in LIGHTNING OVER WATER

And yet, even while the film lets an aleatory, biological fact become the center of dramatic interest, it cannot allow Ray's body to become an exclusive focus of the spectacle; it must place his suffering in the context of a story, if only the story of the film itself. This sort of paradox runs throughout the history of theater: Imperial Rome in the days of Livy might have put real sex and death on the stage, but in other cultures, the vehicle of performance is seldom performed outright. Examples of pure biological performance on film tend to be marginal, including such oddities as Fred Ott's sneeze, stag movies, snuff films, instructional cinema, and Warhol's *Sleep;* at the same time, all acting has a biological

dimension, and biology often contributes powerfully to theatrical effect—witness De Niro's fatness in *Raging Bull,* or the many cases where film exploits the decay of celebrity players (Montgomery Clift's ravaged face in *Judgment at Nuremberg,* Randolph Scott and Joel McCrea in *Ride the High Country,* etc.). Hence *Lightning Over Water* makes an interesting contrast with Don Siegel's *The Shootist* (1976), starring John Wayne. In both films the leading actor is a celebrity and a mythical figure who is dying of cancer; but *Lightning Over Water* is a much more direct, urgent, and makeshift work, and it never romanticizes its subject. Ironically, it shows Wenders and Ray talking in a hospital while a television set in the background announces that John Wayne has been hospitalized elsewhere.

Godard once wrote that cinema differs from painting because it "seizes life and the mortal aspect of life." "The person one films," he said, "is growing older and will die. We film, therefore, a moment when death is working."[12] Wenders gives a clear demonstration of this thesis in a lengthy close-up of Ray near the end of his film. The closest approximation of the shot I can think of is the close-up of the dying Major Amberson (Charles Bennett) in Welles's *The Magnificent Ambersons;* in both cases the actor was literally dying as he played his role, but in *Lightning Over Water* the actor looks back at us and testifies to his condition. He pauses in the midst of his dialogue, breathing heavily, trying to regain composure but unable to fight off illness. Moaning and cursing, he begins to make jokes, threatening to puke all over the camera. "I'm beginning to drool," he says, confessing embarrassment. Finally his situation becomes intolerable and he wants the scene to stop. Offscreen, we hear Wenders's voice telling Ray to order a cut. Ray looks at the cameraman urgently and rather pathetically, anxiety showing in his one good eye, his lips drawn back over his false teeth like parchment over bone. "Cut!" he says, but the camera keeps running. For just a moment Ray looks angry and helpless. "Cut!" he says again, and he is forced to repeat the order before the screen fades to black.

"By exhibiting his proximity to death," Tom Farell has written, "Nick's acting was organic; it was genuine behavior."[13] In one sense this is true, because the actor's body is different from the social construct we call the actor's "self." But in another sense *Lightning Over Water,* like most movies, tends to put biology in the service of character. Ray becomes a man who wants to die in private, similar to the wounded soldier Hemingway writes about in *Death in the Afternoon* (later fictionalized by Thomas Mitchell in *Only Angels Have Wings*). In his close-up we can see culture interacting with nature, so that a familiar theatrical type, a celebrity who is playing himself, and a man who is dying all merge into a single performed event. For a moment the performance frame is extended more broadly than even Sennett or Godard attempted, until we can see its virtual limits.

NOTES

1. Charles Chaplin, *My Autobiography* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1964), pp. 143-46.

2. Erving Goffman, *Frame Analysis* (New York: Harper and Row, 1974), pp. 123-55. See also *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (New York: Doubleday, 1959).

3. Kier Elam, *The Semiotics of Theatre and Drama* (London: Methuen, 1980), p. 8.

4. Quoted by Elam, p. 8.

5. I am grateful to my colleague, Harry M. Geduld, for calling this fact to my attention. I also owe him thanks for showing me *Kid Auto Races at Venice.*

6. Chaplin, p. 144.

7. For example the following dialogue is borrowed directly from Dashiell Hammett's *The Glass Key* (New York, Vintage Books Edition, 1972), p. 58: A friend of Belmondo meets him on the street and remarks, "You oughtn't to wear silk socks with tweeds." Belmondo looks at his socks. "No? I like the feel of silk." His pal shrugs. "Then lay off tweed."

8. Here, for example, is David Thomson writing about Louise Brooks: "[She] was one of the first performers to penetrate to the heart of screen acting . . . Quite simply, she appreciated that the power of the screen actress lay not in impersonation or performance, in the carefully worked out personal narrative of stage acting . . . [but] in thinking out for herself the self-consuming rapture of Lulu." *A Biographical Dictionary of Film,* 2nd ed. (New York: William Morrow, 1981), p. 72.

9. Lee Strassberg, "The Actor and Himself," *Actors on Acting,* ed. Toby Cole and Helen Krich Chinoy (New York: Crown, 1970), p. 623.

10. Strassberg, p. 623.

11. In some other ways, however, the film seems divided against itself. "An actor," Ray tells Wenders at one point, "has to work from a character whose needs are his [own] greatest needs." Perhaps influenced by Ray's indebtedness to the Method, the "plot" of *Lightning Over Water* involves a search for a hidden essence of personality, a true self which is supposedly revealed through documentary and analysis of the players. Whenever it suggests a transcendent, quasi-Freudian set of "needs," it becomes a less post-Modernist work.

12. *Godard on Godard,* trans. Tom Milne (New York: Viking, 1972), p. 181.

13. "Nick Ray's German Friend, Wim Wenders," *Wide Angle,* Vol. 5, no. 4, p. 67.

FRED GLASS

Sign of the Times:

THE COMPUTER AS CHARACTER IN TRON, WAR GAMES, AND SUPERMAN III

Introduction

As early as 1969 we witnessed the first starring role for a computer character in an American film in *2001: A Space Odyssey.*[1] HAL represented as much a new twist on the old theme of techne and revolt as a genuine departure. It relied upon both anthropomorphic convention and an ultimate belief in the superior moral powers of the human heart over cold circuitry's hubris. But a portentous wrinkle has arisen in the old tale in such recent films as *TRON, War Games,* and *Superman III.*

These films continue to share the major thematic assumptions of their mythic and literary forebears, in particular tapping popular feeling and resentment against the introduction of new technologies. But the power of the imagery is enhanced through a changed circumstance: today, the new technology contains the ability to destroy not some symbolic representative human character, but all of humanity itself. That's why in these films computers and 'the bomb' appear on neighboring pedestals in a modern pantheon of sign and myth.

Ironically, the founder of MAGI (Mathematical Applications Group, Inc.) was inspired to create the computer graphics program that figured prominently in the visuals of *TRON* while a nuclear physicist in the mid-sixties.[2] This bit of biographical trivia reveals one clue to the success of the film in establishing its hold over the viewer's imagination: the confluent relationship between nuclear and microchip technologies, embedded not only at the narrative and ideological levels of contemporary popular culture, but even in the history of its image-making.

Despite their condensed, combined identity, the computer is the star, not the bomb—perhaps because it is easier to accept by the film-going public than direct representations of nuclear holocaust. In any case, out of the real material of widespread social anxiety over new technology, Hollywood screenwriters have fashioned a new standby in their stock ensemble: the computer-as-character. Not so simple as if the character were always presented as a villain, this image or sign is a conflicted one. At least two distinct aspects of the computer sign must be taken together to spell out its ideological discourse.

One side of the picture consists of the *integration* of computers in society. The burgeoning of a popular technical subculture creates familiarity, acceptance, an expanding sense of personal power on the part of those sections of the populace educated or privileged enough to climb aboard. We find the other side in the fear and trembling associated with little-understood productive forces, with the bomb, with our lack of control over these phenomena, with the social and economic *disruption* accompanying the computer technologies' undemocratic introduction into the workplace. Hence, another image: the computer as a hostile force, alien and alienating.

The opposing connotations of "computer"—constituting such improbably divergent regions of meaning—disclose the cultural role played by this contradictory image in recent cinema. The computer as character helps to channel our ambivalence toward the new technologies into narrative conflict and mythic resolution. In *TRON, War Games,* and *Superman III,* the social proliferation of computer anxiety is packaged, condensed, transformed, and finally controlled (?) within the benign shape of "family entertainment."

How is this accomplished? The computer-as-character follows the same rules as other characters. These include a rhetoric of type, of genre, of motivations and needs of the

plot. Characters do not have to be human, although within most naturalist or realist narrative they obviously are. But animals can be characters, and trees, rocks, or the sky and earth. All that is necessary is that they play by the rules of anthropomorphic convention: they speak (or have the capacity for speech); they think or feel; they have motivations for the actions they undertake or relationships they create with other characters which are more or less recognizable as human traits, e.g., love, loneliness, greed, etc.

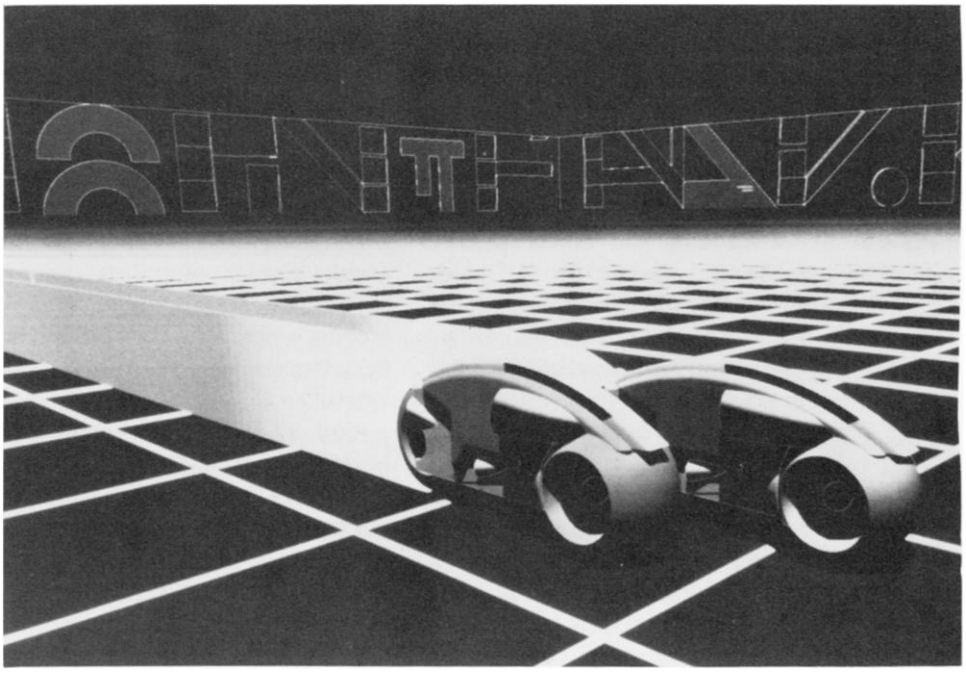
HAL developed what was to become a staple computer trait: the tension between human-like qualities and its actual, non-human, *technological nature*. This defining, contradictory quality provided a human-like sign with which we could identify, and within whose dramatic situation we perceive—more or less consciously—a reasonable approximation of our own ambivalent relationship with new technologies as the latter reshape the objects and processes of everyday life around us.

TRON

TRON takes place within the impossible geography of a mainframe computer's circuitry. The plot and imagery lift generous portions of various quest narratives; allusions to L. Frank Baum and Lewis Carroll abound. So do some of the most impressive special effects ever created for a film, which make it easier to close one's eyes to the derivative nature of the story and some rather large, distressing holes in its logic.

Kevin Flynn (Jeff Bridges) is a software engineer who has lost a power struggle among executives in a large communications corporation. Dillinger, president of the ENCOM corporation (David Warner), stole Flynn's programs, canned him, and erased the computer files that proved Flynn the author. On the basis of these programs Dillinger was made president. However, Dillinger finds himself in turn the blackmailed pawn of the computer's master control program, or MCP, which threatens Dillinger with exposure if he doesn't do the computer's bidding, including helping it gain access to the Pentagon and Kremlin computer memory banks. ("How would you like me to read out the story of how you stole Flynn's programs on the VDTs of the *New York Times*?") The notion of computer "blackmail" needs no motivation, representing a precise measure of popular fears: the MCP's evil intent is implicit, almost more like a birth defect than character flaw. Exposition would be redundant.

With the help of his ex-lover and her new boyfriend (who both still work for the company) Flynn attempts to break into the locked files that prove his innocence and authorship.



"Light cycles" race across the grid: TRON

The computer—HAL-like—observes Flynn at the terminal. It warns Flynn to quit. Flynn, fingers flying at the keyboard, refuses. The computer dematerializes him with a laser gun (ironically designed by his ex-lover) and deposits him within the computer's circuitry.

Once inside, Flynn's adventures "through the looking glass/VDT" begin. His search for the MCP leads him through a series of meetings with various characters from the outside world transformed into computer creatures, called programs. A massive, animated world unfolds around him, replete with video gladiators pitted in combat (shot live action in black-and-white, the frames blown up and hand-painted, and matted against literally hundreds of thousands of computer-generated color images), high-speed chases on "light cycles" (produced in "Synthavision"—see below), and an assortment of hi-tech-looking death machines, all creating a splendidly paranoid environment of enormous scale. This techno-fascist world provides the context for Flynn's ultimate victory over the MCP, whereupon he is able to return to the outside world and ascend to the corporate presidency in place of the deposed Dillinger.

Another computer stars in *TRON*. Were it not for the development of computer-driven graphics imagery over the past decade, *TRON*'s scintillating visuals would have been impossible. Four computer graphics houses combined their talents to create the finished product, utilizing two main methods of new animation processes. MAGI's Synthavision was responsible for the motion sequences. This type of computer graphics generation relies upon building the image from three-dimensional shapes pre-existing in the program. Motion is provided by positioning the object in one place, then in the spot desired for X frames later. The program draws in frames in-between. Commands are given through an authoring-level language. Triple I (Information International, Inc.) created the more intricately detailed images with its Foonly computer. A digital tablet was used to move a carefully drawn image into the computer, its curved surfaces broken down into infinitesimal polygonal parts. These were refined with the addition of thousands of pixels, amplifying color and light properties of the image.[3]

Perhaps the single most stunning sequence in *TRON* occurs as Flynn is "derezzed" and sent into the ENCOM computer circuitry. A wrenching, high-speed tunnel whirls past us, its finely etched walls outclassing previous animated corridors in *Fantastic Voyage* and *2001*. We break free into a series of computer-generated planes, which set abstract geometric constructions revolving about one another, dissolving through one plane to the next. This narrative bridge, Flynn's passage between worlds, could stand on its own as a demonstration of state-of-the-art computer-aided cinematic design. (Evidently the film-makers agreed. They use the same sequence again, in reverse, when Flynn re-emerges.)

Oddly enough, *TRON* participates in a genre stretching back to the first silent black-and-white Disney efforts. From the combined live action/animation of the *Alice in Cartoonland* series to *TRON* we could trace more than one line of continuity. Beyond the rather eerie parallel of a "normal" person finding her/himself inside the representative medium of communications of their era, the hens in *Alice's Eggplant,* egged on by "Little Red Hensky," go on strike against the automation of their egglaying. The specter of technological forces replacing the hens' natural egg-laying rhythms —at a time when Ford's assembly line was revolutionizing industrial methods—was met with animated unrest and revolt by these feathered victims of progress. (Of course, there are a few differences between the earlier and later Disney products. *Alice* cost $750; *TRON,* $21 million.)

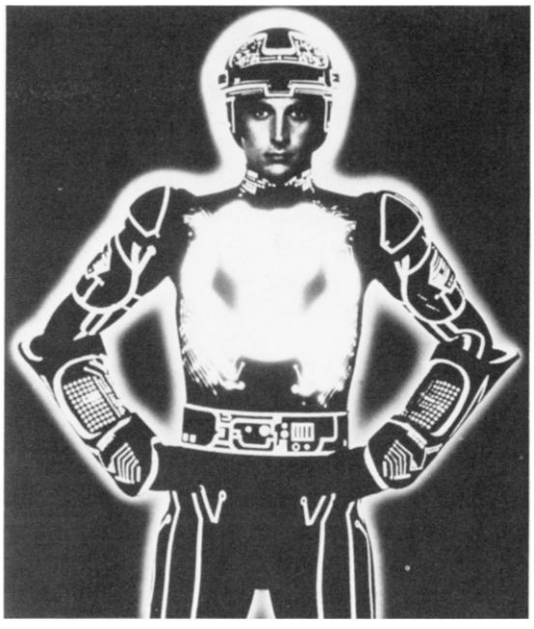
As anthropomorph, the human qualities of the computer MCP in *TRON* are the negative characteristics of a technocrat; power-hungry, ruled by profit, authoritarian, unscrupulous—the qualities of a modern captain of industry. Unlike earlier capitalists, this one has the functional narrative advantage of literally lacking a heart. Freed from the banal conventional naturalism besetting human beings, this character instead lives through the *signs* of power. The MCP blackmails Dillinger in the outside world, but literally "bends to its will" Dillinger's program look-alike, Sark, with electrical current inside the computer; it derezzes Flynn and throws him into its circuits/jail. It is all reminiscent—at the level of a parable's innuendo—of our worst-fear scenario of what could happen in the technical

transformation of society.

When we catch glimpses of the MCP "himself"—I use the male gender because it speaks with a man's voice, resembling nothing so much as the stentorian tones of the imperial Oz—he is huge, a devilish presence whirling within an infernal machine of awesome dimension, a ghostly face plastered inside a dynamo. This power-mad, technological force—truly technology run amok—holds absolute power over life and death of the people in its circuits, or so it believes. In time-honored fashion, the MCP's hubris proves its downfall. The key for resolution of the problems posed by the evil character's mythic power is to humanize it, make it humanly flawed. This sets the stage for the hero to triumph over the machine's ultimately impossible attempts at being human. Flynn shows up the MCP: people *can* break the control of the computer over their lives, especially if the machine believes itself above moral constraint.

The MCP's depiction raises other considerations. The antagonistic computer, soon after the story begins, sheds its more conventional trappings as individual anthropomorphic character for the rather expanded possibilities as the *situation* within which the story appears. When Flynn drops into the circuits of the computer, the insides of the beast (Jonah or Pinocchio and the whale?) become the universe with its own internal laws by which Flynn must make his way. Like the world inside the looking glass for Alice, or the dream from which Dorothy awakens in *The Wizard of Oz,* the rules bear some sort of relationship to those under which we operate in our world. Just *what* sort bears examining.

TRON is quite explicit in detailing the problems generated by large corporations for the people they employ: deadly competition among executives; dehumanization of workers; encouragement of immoral acts for profit; stifling of creativity when it threatens the status quo. The film is considerably less clear about the larger social relations governing these. For instance, the "bad" corporate executive is simply an updated "bad" capitalist of the Frank Capra/Eddy Arnold variety. The problem here, as for liberal directors in Hollywood in the thirties, is not capitalism or the class of capitalists, but the rotten apple that spoils the barrel.



Video warrior in TRON

However, the latter view is at odds with other hints dropped by *TRON* along the way. The old designer who founded the company in his garage criticizes Dillinger, saying he was throttling the creativity of the workers with his tight rein, over-concern with security, and exercise of arbitrary authority. By implication there is an indictment of a system that ironically, through security requirements determined by competition with other corporations, must repress the creativity that it ostensibly encourages. But points such as these remain hazy, unacknowledged contradictions within the undertow of two overriding ideological currents.

First, Flynn operates within the moral parameters of old-fashioned, individualist free enterprise. Outraged by Dillinger's theft of Flynn's inventions, these parameters are vindicated and consecrated by the hero attaining ENCOM's presidency. The system works, you see, because given *unbridled* competition—not fixed by "unfair" abuses of power—the cream rises to the surface. The fact that in Adam Smith's original argument the surface referred to that of the *market,* while in *TRON* it has become the *corporation* (shown earlier in the film to stifle free competition) is apparently of no account.

Or is the problem the corporation? The film fudges here, as it must if it is not to become

Sark (David Warner) in TRON

an explictly anticorporate statement. The rotten *individual,* fingered as the villain, takes the heat for corporate social relations. In turn, the evil individual's responsibility is shuffled off, displaced onto another, more evil and powerful villain, the MCP.

The computer represents the other ideological theme, technological determinism. On this territory the essential argument is made for the film's ending (although once again, not explicitly): that technology, not social relationships, makes the world go round. Computer anxiety runs interference for the otherwise logical conclusion that not machines, nor bad individuals, but the structure of corporate capitalism is the problem.

We should look at the film's end in this light. From the destruction of the MCP inside the computer, we are taken to the roof of a large skyscraper in Los Angeles. Flynn lands in a helicopter, and hustles down into the building. The camera remains on the roof as the light goes from day to night in stop motion, causing the LA street grid to light up, resembling the animated circuitry of the computer. Get it? The whole world out there is one big computer, and we're inside.

The ending becomes a dazing reversal of great cynicism: Flynn, innocent of this knowledge, is shown by the day-become-night, real world-become-computer to be stuck back within the control of the very forces he believes he had defeated, and inevitably so. Concluding the film this way is not only completely unsatisfying for the story (what happened to everyone else?) but also for the ideological themes of individual enterprise's reward, supposedly the moral point against the evil MCP and Dillinger. The happy ending is stilted and artificial, true, if Flynn just becomes president and that's that. It would make sense neither for the resolution of problems set up by the plot nor for the social relationships it calls into question. Tacking on the street-grid/circuit does make sense, though only for resolving the mythic level of the film —and its success on this score is dubious, considering its despairing, deterministic outlook. It is like dream-conflict resolution: not the threads of narrative tied together, nor dramatic structure, but symbols condensed, unified, and relieved of oppositional force.

Thus the problematic ending of *TRON* should be seen not so much as flawed as revealing of its assumptions. If the world is becoming a giant computer, twilight descending, this must be measured against the computer-as-world that we've just passed through with Jonah/Alice/Dorothy/Flynn, which has been treated with a moral and social critique implicitly applicable to our society, along the lines of "what is right in a technological system?" *TRON* proclaims the belief in people over technology at every opportunity ("Do you think the users still exist?" asks one program of another. "I hope so. I don't want to break out to find a bunch of cold circuits"). But the overall effect of all this verbal protestation is undermined by the constant barrage of special effects, within the giant scale of which the humans are fairly well lost to view. Form recapitulates ideology.

In the universe inside the computer, the individual is pitted against the massive weight of corporate competition and bureaucratically controlled technology. The reappearance of the characters developed briefly in the outside world in the computer's circuits merely underscores the allegorical pointers that the "real world" is becoming programmed the same way. The ending judges the outcome of the struggle between Flynn and computer, us and them[4]—and they win. By the film's end the dominant image is one of a computer anxiety grown to global proportions. As in the paranoid's dream, the external world has become transformed in terms of the internal dreamscape.

War Games

In *War Games* the Joshua computer also mushrooms from character to world scale. But this growth entails some important differences with *TRON*. Joshua is presented not as evil but naive; the character's dream that threatens to engulf us is melancholia; and the computer's defeat is not—as in *TRON*—snatched from us at the end due to inevitable march of technology. *War Games* articulates a liberal humanism (pacifist, antinuclear) which refuses to be undercut by the conflict with technological determinism that runs through both films. *War Games* provides a clearer illustration of the Janus nature of new computer technologies: the split between their usefulness and out-of-control qualities are divided between two computer characters, the teenage boy David (and his home PC) and the military's WOPR computer (War Operations Planned Response), also called Joshua.

David is a nice upper-middle-class white boy who goes to high school (where he underachieves) and lives at home with Mom, Dad, dog, and computer. As an underachiever, he is the "perfect target for the Soviets to manipulate into espionage," according to one of the FBI agents that arrest him. Actually less malevolent than this, David loves to play video games. Mom deals real estate over the phone at dinner, while Dad has achieved something really unique: buttering corn on the cob by lathering a piece of bread with butter, and then rolling the slice of bread around the corn. Under cover of these wholesome activities, David sneaks a look at a brochure for the latest offering from a video game company. He goes upstairs and instructs his PC to call all the phone numbers in Sunnyvale, California, and log the responses from other computers, so that he may break into the game company's files and play the new game.

When he returns to his room with his hyperathletic friend Jennifer, a half dozen numbers are displayed, waiting for his followup. Jennifer asks what the computer is doing; he replies, "It's dialing numbers." There is no confusion here about the computer's place in the scheme of things—*it* is merely a tool, a thing.

One of the numbers refuses David entry to its files. David—who has already proven his hacking abilities by changing Jennifer's and his failing biology grades to passing—is intrigued. He goes to a couple of hilariously neurotic young techie friends who work in a computer company (shades of "Eckyl and Jeckyl" in *Alphaville*). They tell him about "backdoors," passwords inserted into programs by their inventors to allow them privileged access that even the clients don't know about. David researches the program's inventor—making the sidepoint that properly motivated, alienated young public school students can be excellent scholars—and discovers enough to realize the password is "Joshua," after the scientist's son, who died with his mother in a car crash.

After Joshua displays its opening menu, David chooses to play Global Thermonuclear War. The rest of the plot revolves around the desperate struggle to stop Joshua from playing out the game to its deadly conclusion—for the giant NORAD computer doesn't know the difference between game and reality. David and Jennifer go through a series of misadventures, fall into tentative adolescent love, elude the bumbling FBI through David's superior hi-tech expertise, and finally teach Joshua an important lesson through analogy with tic-tac-toe: "Strange game," muses the computer, after it decides not to launch nuclear missiles after all, "the only winning move is not to play."

The character of Joshua is not shown as a technology gone berserk, because it cannot go berserk—*it* is not a person, even though it is a character (infused with the spirit of its creator's dead son). On the contrary, the problem with Joshua is its completely rational nature, which renders the computer unable to distinguish between its digital reproduction of input from reality and reality itself. The computer's worldview depends on a flawed, technical semiotic, faulty because it is only logical, and not tempered with other, human qualities—in much the same way that the military, it is inferred, can only see messages from the "other side" through the prism of its own rigid mindset.

Two human characters inform the meaning of the Joshua character: Berringer, the four-star general, and Dr. Falken, the scientist who developed it and named it after his dead son. Berringer is self-admittedly old-fashioned. Machines have their place in his picture of

things: under the control of people. Yet even he is forced to bend reluctantly before the dictates of the giant computer's readouts—less literally, but as surely as Sark inside the computer in *TRON.*

The inventor is a modified version of the gentle scientist who, horrified with the evil uses to which his gift to humanity has been put, has turned away from war-related research and applied his talents to peaceful and natural pursuits. Dr. Falken spends his time constructing and tinkering with model pterodactyls—a rather literal image of his own flight from the hi-tech horrors he has helped create.

The effects wreaked on Falken's personality through the combination of personal tragedy and social isolation (encouraged by hi-tech work) complements the insight already illustrated through the two "nerd" characters: that the computer and related technologies seem to be transforming human relationships and personalities—those closest to the vortex run the risk of getting sucked under.

While the character of Joshua is essentially conflated with the bomb, the computer is also humanized to a high degree. It talks, calls David on the phone, mistakenly "believing" him to be Dr. Falken (exhibiting signs of a special "felt" relationship with its creator/father); it wants to play games. By the end of the film Dr. Falken is referring to it unconsciously as gendered. Joshua also demonstrates the fearsome ability to turn himself back on after everyone thought the game was over.

Falken, the nerds, and others closest to the computer become involved in a strange dialectical balancing act. Something of their own humanity has been sacrificed, the price paid in a Faustian bargain with microprocessor technology. While the nerds are just weird, Falken takes a more drastic ground. Showing the kids dinosaur-filled Willis O'Brien outtakes in his living room, he tells them "It's natural for species to become extinct." Buried in his mourning, Falken is quite willing to allow the main difference between his private world and the rest of the world—that everyone else is still alive—to be extinguished: a subtle psychological point scored by the filmmakers, as if to say, "Imagine, after a nuclear holocaust, the private tragedy multiplied a billion-fold." Falken's dangerous confusion of internal and external signs and events in his life forms a personal parallel to the similar confusion evidenced by Joshua.

Exhibiting a gentle, naive faith in its programmed worldview that nuclear war is there to be waged and won, just like any other computer game, Joshua is afflicted with the same blind spot in its circuits as the society that programmed it, its supposed master: an overdeveloped technology coupled with an underdeveloped sense of what to use it for. As in *TRON,* though, the nuances of this computer character are not fully shaded in until considered in relationship with other characters; the child side, for instance, is overshadowed by another aspect, that of nemesis, when Falken's perception and use of Joshua is replaced by General Berringer's.

David's home PC is not a character. It remains simply the tool and plaything of a relatively privileged boy, whose environs look like clones of the house, class, and family of *Ordinary People.* This computer is an extension of David's personality, which is however thereby transformed into a computer-using personality. The adolescent puts his personal technology to adolescent uses. The potentially powerful applications of a computer are channeled into "harmless" and trivial uses, even as the boy doesn't know quite what to do with himself as he grows up. Boy and computer represent a microcosm of the more generalized confusion over uses posed by the new technology already evidenced by Falken and Joshua.

Given such a teleological vacuum for the cultural absorption of computers, the technology in *War Games,* by default, moves into the driver's seat. One computer talking with another brings up to date Marx's description of commodity fetishism: "A definite social relation between people takes on the fantastic form of a relation between things." It is significant that the boy's PC locks into the most prevalent, socially valued (in terms of time, money and extent) use of computing and new technology, the military use. The seemingly autonomous personal computing subculture is linked with the larger social impact of the new technologies as they spread through the military infrastructure. The personal uses of computers, encompassing the possibilities of individual accomplishment and growth for a youth, run up against the question, Will he be

here long enough to learn to use his computer more productively?

War Games reiterates the sense of *TRON*'s ending, and clarifies the power of its deterministic imagery; the entire globe is indeed similar to the inside of a giant malevolent computer, when the possibility of nuclear war becoming —however briefly, and finally—*our* macro-environment rests within the fragile circuitry of a Defense Department mainframe. The film's somewhat flimsy claim to realism succeeds in maintaining our suspension of disbelief due to this entry point into our daily experience, where we live a slightly more mundane and repressed version of Flynn's adventures in the evil technoworld of *TRON,* so long as the nuclear computer's plug remains unpulled.

David and Jennifer: WAR GAMES

Superman III

Neither as tightly scripted as *War Games,* nor, like *TRON,* filled with dazzling special effects, *Superman III* develops above its throwaway narrative a far more incisive and radical critique of the relations between people and technology. Its looseness affords the film the room to explore political and social issues relating to the computer revolution without seeming to, within the protective cover of our comic-book expectations. Raggedly assembled beneath the surface of the two main characters, Superman and Augustus Gordon, runs a reasonably sharp assessment of the effects of new technology on the lives of various sorts of people in their social niches.

Evil capitalist Ross Webster (Robert Vaughn) wants to eliminate the competition to one of his multinational corporation's enterprises, coffee. A newly hired programmer (Richard Pryor) is, Webster learns, a computer genius. The capitalist blackmails him into writing a program that causes a weather satellite to *create* weather in order to ruin the coffee crop in Bolivia. When Superman intervenes, Webster realizes he stands in the way of his grand plan. He has the programmer, Augustus Gordon, design a supercomputer capable of killing Superman. Gus has qualms—both moral and fear that it won't work—but is coerced by the blackmail threat and seduced by the technical challenge of creating the supercomputer.

Before the computer is finished, however, Gus has another computer design synthetic kryptonite, and exposes Superman with it. It doesn't kill Superman, but does turn him into a Jekyll and Hyde: he nearly rapes Lana Lang; people die because he arrives late at a disaster; in order to sleep with Webster's kept mistress, Lorelei, he punches a hole in an oil tanker, spilling its contents into the sea; and he ends up in a bar, filled with booze and self-hatred. He melts his own image in the bar-room mirror with a blast of heat-vision, and rushes out to do battle—with himself. His good and evil sides split apart, and in a junkyard, surrounded by the rusting remnants of older, used-up technologies, Clark Kent and the evil Superman struggle until the evil side is vanquished, and the effects of the synthetic kryptonite purged.

Meanwhile Webster's supercomputer is completed, equipped with exotic military hardware (including a "real" kryptonite ray and an MX missile—the obligatory link with nuclear fears). Superman is lured into battle; he survives the confrontation through the intervention of Gus, who unplugs his creation, allowing Superman to escape. But then the computer turns itself back on. In perhaps the single most horrifying scene of any of these films, the runaway computer, after draining the Atlantic seaboard of its electrical power, enfolds Webster's equally evil sister in its

circuits and transforms her into a hideous, microprocessed Elsa Lanchester. Using *her* as *its* tool, the computer pins Webster, Lorelei, and Gus to the walls with bolts of energy until Superman returns and finally defeats it.

Consistently, throughout *Superman III,* things and people are not what they seem. Doubling of characters abounds. In the cases of Superman and Gordon, the doubling explicitly involves their relationship with technology. Other dual characterizations score their points, however, also. For instance, Lorelie, a caricatured dumb blonde, is seen reading Kant in one scene—she quickly stuffs the book under a mattress when Webster unexpectedly returns. Her secret identity allows her to live—briefly—outside her alienated condition as kept woman of the capitalist. However, she knows better than to step outside her socially assigned role if she wants to maintain the style of living to which she has become accustomed.

The desire for wealth and power is Gus's moral Achilles' heel, too; as with Lorelei, it is responsible for his toadying to Webster. The character of Gus is layered with contradictions, and is easily the most ambitious and complexly written in the film. It overreaches, but Pryor does an excellent job attempting to pull off its various purposes. It is through his populist-constructed eyes that we view computer technology in *Superman III.*

An improbable "little guy" character, to match the improbability of Superman, we meet Gus standing in an unemployment line. Informed his benefits have run out, his eye is caught by a matchbook advertisement for a computer school. Here he rapidly discovers he can do things that, according to his teacher, cannot be done with a computer: he is a computer genius.

Gus's situation represents the fantasy for everyone who, unlike the kids in *War Games,* really are "ordinary people," and therefore don't have the means to buy an IBM PC for their very own, nor the education to leap across the technology gap from video game parlors to systems analysis. Compare with Flynn in *TRON* after he's sacked: you can believe white, young, educated Flynn as entrepreneur, opening his own video-game palace. Unskilled, unemployed, middle-aged Gus as the man who designs the world's most powerful computer on scraps of paper and the backs of gum wrappers? Why not—black Horatio Alger in the computer era—just as Superman himself is a why not.

Like David in *War Games,* Gus is a computer-user who tampers with powers beyond his ken. In increasing steps he is entranced by the promise of shortcuts to wealth and power, and then pays the price. But Gus's is the mundane hubris of a working-class hero. His grandiose schemes are constantly checked by the real power of Webster, who like capitalists everywhere hold blackmail of one sort or another over the heads of their workers to keep them in line. For Webster, Gus is a tool; he uses Gus in exactly the same way that the supercomputer is to be used: in pursuit of his dream of economic domination. The computer's neutral potential is channeled toward evil not by its maker, but through the designs of the holder of the pursestrings behind the inventor. Once more, the comparison with *TRON* is helpful. For all the contortions of *Superman III*'s logic, and all the mythic overlays across the narrative, it remains clear-sighted on the score of who holds real power, and is therefore able to offer the relationship, including blackmail, of Webster/Gordon/computer against that of Dillinger/MCP.

As a consequence, in *Superman III* the computer—if fantastic—is not made cuddly or imperial. While in *TRON* and *War Games* the computers are anthropomorphic, here it is simply a death machine, bearing closer resemblance to a *Star Wars* battle cruiser than teddy-bear Joshua or Oz-like MCP. The social anxiety about control over technology running as a thread through all three films also has a different dynamic in *Superman III* because of the Superman character, who takes over one of the functions of the computer-as-character—the blurring of human and machine qualities—albeit in reverse.

The function of the hero character has remained essentially unchanged since Gilgamesh. As a force for social identification, the mythic hero almost always embodies performance of essential social tasks, prefiguring their accomplishment. Superman represents the personification of technical power applied to what are perceived as socially necessary ends. (It is no coincidence that the appearance of Superman in the late thirties took

place against the backdrop of emergence from the Great Depression through an unprecedented scale of war production.) However, in his latest incarnation, in *Superman III,* the character is strangely conflicted, and his interpersonal relations—whether as Clark Kent or Superman—tend to come as a deflating shock to the sign traditionally known as "Superman."

Whenever this embodiment of social and technological forces becomes a mere human figure with emotions, sexuality, human frailties, etc., the believability of the other, mythic side of his character comes under strain. In *Superman III* this tendency has been brought forward, called to our attention, through the portrayal of Clark as even more a bumbler than usual. When Superman is not being super, we (like him) are quite aware that he is really someone else: something like an alienation effect is produced, which reinforces that other, customarily repressed awareness that we are watching a film. The narrative asks us to bounce back and forth between acceptance of mythic, technological powers in a human package, and the redefinition of this character as fallible, mortal, and nonmythic.

It is a tall order, and one way the filmmakers (Richard Lester directed, from a script by David and Leslie Newman) manage a solution is to play the film for laughs, exaggerating and distorting the already hard-to-swallow aspects of the story, characters, and situations. Winks are thrown in the audience's path, Christopher Reeves, the actor, essentially saying to us, "Isn't this silly—you and I know that I'm super/not super." Yet there remains in *Superman III* a core of realism—through Gus's situation, ideologically articulated with real social processes—that asks us not to laugh the entire time; and to laugh at the real social situations that the film depicts absurdly.

From Pryor's first moments at the computer school, a parallel arises with Superman's impossible feats, and with the wish-fulfillment of a dream about accomplishing some difficult and new activity or task in one's life. This particular dream taps a deep social root today: the belief held by millions of computer-illiterate Americans that knowledge of computers is a ticket to jobs, money, power—especially the power *felt* to be the computers' (but which

SUPERMAN III

in the absence of direct experience controlling computers can only be imagined). The clarity of *Superman III*'s social vision falls down here: far from dispelling the vagueness of this sense about computers, it actively contributes to the confusion. Not in its depiction of the computer's capacities, which is generally better than that of the other films, but in what it takes to become a genuine master of the microchip. The *work* of moving from illiterate to technical expert is glossed over with Gus's utopian leap. Of course, the ease of the process is also its appeal.

The parallel is drawn between Gus and Superman in a loose but consistent way throughout. Gus doesn't want to kill Superman. Yet, fascinated by the technology he magically knows how to control, he goes ahead and designs a super computer, the purpose of which is to kill Superman. Then again, when Superman is caught in the deadly kryptonite ray, Gus pulls the plug on his beloved creation to help him escape. He is of two minds about his relationship with the technology, acting out his ambivalent feelings in contradictory impulses.

Superman, as the personification of technological power, literalizes his own ambivalence for us. The curious scene in the junkyard—a latter-day battle of Titans—capsulizes the predicament facing Superman: is he a man using his technical powers to help people, or

SUPERMAN III

does his technological nature and power subsume his humanity? Superman's dilemma recapitulates Gus's struggle, and provides an alternative to Webster, who unambiguously considers technology his means toward personal aggrandizement and power over others.

Although it is as little concerned with naturalistic representation as *TRON* or *War Games, Superman III* actually reflects a more accurate sense of computers and their place in society. In fact, the film's relative clarity of perspective depends on its cartoon-like structure: relying on broad strokes instead of attention to detail, *Superman III* gets away with slipping a savagely anticapitalist message into "family entertainment." Because the film foregrounds its mythic structure through the Superman figure, the other characters can be dealt with as cardboard cut-outs, too: good girl, bad girl, evil capitalist, wish-fulfillment—all fit snugly within the brightly painted canvas surrounding the superhero. And each can then be explored for its own contradictory, mythic qualities. Lorelei hovers between parody of the fifties blonde bombshell and (the Kant scene) addressing our assumptions about her as character in order to undermine them. Webster is so happy about being so evil that we know he's the villain before he opens his mouth.

Gus is something different, fitting no prefabricated Hollywood type. His character works through playing off roles, one against another, as the occasion demands, from down-and-out screw-up, to Stepin Fetchit when Webster turns up the heat, to modern hi-tech success story. His relationship with computers, while no more fantastic than Flynn's in *TRON,* is at the same time far more hopeful in its suggestion that the "little guy" might be able to grow in personal and social power through control over computing—a limited perspective, to be sure, but one nowhere to be found in the gaudier, less broadly social visions of people caught in the matrix of new technology presented by the other films.

Concluding Notes

I would like to summarize my theoretical approach to these three films. My point of departure was that the computer-as-character represented, mutatis mutandis, a structural, common element of each narrative. It served a similar purpose in terms of plot, point of address for its audience, and referred to roughly the same set of ideological assumptions—although the stance of each film in relation to this set of assumptions differed, the common terrain on which the differences were expressed remained that of technological determinism. Despite the often spectacular visual appearance of the films, I concentrated on developing the analysis elsewhere, focusing

on the relationship between the narrative signifier and the mostly unspoken ideological signified. There are two reasons for this approach.

First, I find it more interesting. The question, why has the computer suddenly become a stock character? becomes on reflection various others, including: Why has the character been constituted as a threat? What are the mediations between the "computer revolution" and the images that "Hollywood" (generic) produces referring to it? What are the moral issues that have attached themselves to use of new technologies, and how are they explored in the cinema? Each film posed these questions differently, but the differences mostly revealed the film-makers' decision to resolve them at the level of myth. Hence, it seemed necessary to analyze the films at this level.

Second, although the special-effects images of each film could undoubtedly have been minutely dissected for the revelation of stylistic characteristics peculiar to each, the simple fact is that the image work of computer-assisted film-making is in its historical infancy, and the techniques have not yet been tamed to the point where they are used for anything besides the spectacular. Thus in the eighties we are witness to a mono-semic image: the "hi-tech look," the processed mega-frame.

Here the image circles back to the same place as the narrative it embodies. Computer technology is being embedded in all three levels in film-making practice: formal/technical, narrative, and ideological. There is an unusually tight fit in these films between the three levels of film experience, due to the historical conjuncture.

The more things change . . . A new set of visual expectations is being constructed around the old kernel, what does a film look like? The generation growing up with *Star Wars* expects different images than those who cut their eye teeth on *Buck Rogers.* But the loaded nature of the issues addressed by the computer films—questions such as the survival of our species, mediated through the computer filter—seem to have resulted in some things remaining the same, e.g., the reduction of the ideological theme to mythic status.

All ideologies are not mythic. However, all myths are ideological. Myth is a particular form of ideological expression, called into modern usage when the questions are so hot there appears to be no other way to handle them except through the bundling of opposites—good/evil, life/death, ruler/ruled, human/machine—that has assisted in the process since the time when only faces and flames surrounded by darkness served for visual accompaniment. The hi-tech look would in this sense remain an embellishment, extraneous or coincidental to discussion of the issues attached to the computer-as-character, were it not for its creeping movement toward incorporation in that ever-receding horizon, the language of cinema. Perhaps its significance will turn out to be that it managed, for a time, to restate formally the conflicts addressed in the narrative and ideological levels of expensive mass market movies at a moment when only the wealthy could afford to do so.

In any event, by living through films in which giant computers "die" or are defeated in their nasty designs, we survive more than a couple hours before the screen. We survive —or come to believe we can or will make it through—the onslaught of the computer revolution. Unfortunately, the catharsis' relief—if that is indeed what we are getting—is short. For most of us the new technologies represent something quite outside our control. This common subjectivity lays us open to the subterranean work performed by the computer-as-character. Until that power relationship is transformed, we won't see the last of the image that expresses it.

NOTES

1. Godard's *Alphaville* predates the American films by several years, and anticipates their themes. Also, I understand that *The Demon Seed*—which I haven't seen—explores similar terrain.

2. "Computer animation comes of age in a studio on Dopey Drive," *Smithsonian,* July, 1982, by Michael Schrage, p. 92.

3. *Smithsonian,* pp. 87-95.

4. This "them" condenses bureaucratic and technological forces —leaving the question of whether *corporations* are "us" or "them" conveniently unaddressed.

NAOMI GREENE

Coppola, Cimino: The Operatics of History

In retrospect, it seems as if a new kind of cinematic melodrama, exemplified by Francis Ford Coppola's Godfather films and *Apocalypse Now* and by Michael Cimino's *The Deerhunter* and *Heaven's Gate,* developed in the 1970s. Variously described as "historical," "operatic," "choral" or "epic," this melodrama marked a new sensibility in American film, at once deeply theatrical and pessimistic, a sensibility which reflected on the one hand the formal influence of European and especially Italian models and on the other the traumatized social/political climate of post-Vietnam, post-Watergate America. Above all, this sensibility was dominated by a sense of history and a taste for spectacle which were interwoven with each other and with the narrative in unprecedented ways.

Many of the striking features of these films call to mind the defining characteristics of stage melodrama at its inception around the time of the French Revolution: heightened theatricality, characters greater than life, powerful emotions and extreme actions, startling scenic effects and elaborate *mise-en-scène,* as well as a penchant for great contrasts on both the moral level (a Manichean sense of good and evil) as well as the scenic one (contrasts in lights, costumes, and so on). Lastly, they attribute a pivotal role to music (the Godfather theme, the violin accompaniment in *Heaven's Gate*) which was originally *the* defining element of melodrama. The vast social and political fresco against which these films are played out (Vietnam in the case of *Apocalypse Now* and *The Deerhunter,* the immigrant experience in the Godfather films, the "Rustler's War" or the Johnson County Wars in *Heaven's Gate*) suggest, in particular, historical melodrama, which was one of the forms taken by melodrama at an early date. Born at a troubled historical moment—when the old world order, embodied in the French monarchy, was approaching its convulsive death throes, to be followed by decades of turmoil in the Terror and the rise and fall of Napoleon—early melodrama often turned to real events and characters. In the words of one critic, the French Revolution provided excellent models for monstrous villains for "Nothing was improbable to people who had lived through Thermidor."[1]

If these films recall such melodrama, even more so do they evoke one of the paths taken by melodrama in the course of the nineteenth century: opera and, in particular, Verdi. Once again, the vastness of the frescos they present is such that they suggest less the fairly domestic Verdi of *La Traviata* than the Verdi of the great historical/political operas such as *Rigoletto, I Lombardi,* or *Don Carlos.* In such works, history sets the scene for the portrayal of Romantic passions and conventions: heroes are torn by conflicting loyalties, crushed by Destiny, tangled in tragic conflicts which can end only in murder or self-destruction. In many instances, these tremendously popular operas were enmeshed in the deeply rooted passions surrounding Italian unification: for these reasons, Antonio Gramsci, the great Italian Marxist theoretician, saw them as the Italian equivalent of the "national-popular" literature created in nineteenth-century France by greatly popular authors such as Sue, Dumas, Balzac. In a penetrating article on melodrama, the contemporary critic Thomas Elsaesser describes this phenomenon thus: "In France it is the works of Sue, Hugo and Balzac that reflect most closely the relation of melodrama to social upheaval while the national liberals in Italy during the Risorgimento . . . apparently saw their political aspirations reflected in Verdi's operas."[2]

In general, cinema, with its links to popular culture and its mass audience, its ability to create spectacles, has been seen as the twentieth-century counterpart of both melodrama and opera. It is hardly coincidental that

The original melodrama formula: spectacle + music (APOCALYPSE NOW).

"classical" melodrama died at the same time that cinema was born. As for its link with opera, in an article entitled "Pageants of Violence," Mark Le Fanu observes that: "The emotional charge of opera . . . translated into the 'expressive' *mise-en-scène* of early silent cinema as lighting, gesture, musical accompaniment, could stand as the very definition of melo-drama . . . the portrayal of historical events in the cinema inherits opera's emotional intensity in the emphasis it has always placed on violence, gesture and spectacle."[3] Certainly, such a view is confirmed by films considered historical epics: the spectacular elements in films as diverse as Cecil B. De Mille's Biblical frescos, *Reds,* or even *Star Wars,* convey, in Le Fanu's words, the "emotional charge of opera." But what distinguishes these films from, say, both the operas of Verdi and the recent films by Coppola and Cimino is the fact that they do not touch upon issues of national destiny, issues with the potential of stirring deep collective sentiments. *Reds,* for example, may intrigue us intellectually, stir us visually, but it does not touch the raw nerve in the national psyche that was so moved by *The Deerhunter* or the Godfather films. Given this important distinction, it is highly suggestive that, like Verdi's great historical operas, these recent films were made at a deeply troubled historical era, an era which had witnessed not only Watergate and Vietnam, but the end of a certain concept of America. And, I suggest, largely because of their connection to a traumatic and political era, some of them were able to strike a profoundly responsive chord in audiences. (The failure of *Heaven's Gate* may be partially attributed to the fact that by the time it appeared, the national mood was already changing.) And, as in opera, this chord went so deep, and involved the viewer at such a visceral level, largely through the manipulation of spectacle.

Both the weight given spectacle, and the fact that they evoke crucial moments in the national destiny, bring these films closer to Italian directors such as Visconti, or the Ber-

tolucci of *1900,* than to American films of recent years. Not surprisingly, these Italian directors have always been seen as quintessentially operatic. To quote Le Fanu once again: "The operatic view of history has a long tradition . . . most vividly exemplified perhaps by movies like Visconti's *Senso* or Rossellini's two dramatisations of 19th century history *Viva L'Italia* and *Vanina Vanini.* In all these films history is mediated through violent and melodramatic passion. . . ."[4] Despite these similarities, Visconti's view of history is essentially different from that found in these American films. History may be "mediated through passion" but, at the same time, his best films such as *Il Gattopardo* or *Senso,* both of which deal with crucial moments in the creation of modern Italy, are deeply analytic in their approach to history, inspired by a Marxian view of social classes and economic structures. Even the extreme estheticism which is evident in his use of *mise-en-scène* and costumes is linked to underlying themes: significant details reveal the spirit of an epoch or of a certain class. And his tone is consistently theatrical, so much so in fact that the stage of history and the stage of spectacle (be it opera or film) emerge as interwoven domains. Like many of Visconti's characters, the Prince of Salina in *Il Gattopardo* is aware of himself as an actor upon a stage which is both that of history and film. His is a distance born of world-weariness as much as philosophy; his theatrical acting corresponds to a world which views reality itself as a phenomenon subject to multiple illusions.

This combination of historical accuracy and analysis, together with a Baroque/illusionist world view which presents history as theater, is not found in these recent American films. As is usually the case in American cinema, their power lies less in analysis than in recreating the feel and climate of certain experiences (such as the horror of war which comes through in *The Deerhunter*), in presenting believable and even ordinary people (Cimino's, in particular, act with great naturalism) who find themselves in extraordinary situations. (*Apocalypse Now* is the exception here since it operates almost exclusively on a mythic level.) In these films, history is often transmuted into myth as it becomes a springboard for general comments involving human destiny, good and evil, the tragedy of power. The Godfather films go beyond the story of a Mafia family as they create a drama of greed, vengeance and power; *Heaven's Gate* is not only a conflict between cattlemen and farmers, or even a class confrontation on a vast scale, but, like *The Deerhunter,* a struggle between good and evil.

This view of history—as a battleground for moral issues which is shaped by individuals and psychology, rather than by economic and social forces—is perfectly in tune with the melodramatic/operatic sensibility underlying these films. While they do not share Visconti's view of the world as spectacle or theater, they are imbued with a heightened theatricality, such as that which characterized early melodrama, which operates on several levels. Within the diegesis itself, this theatricality is underscored by the presence of towering villains (Michael Corleone in the Godfather films, the chief of the cattlemen in *Heaven's Gate,* the Vietcong torturers in *The Deerhunter*), the presence of powerful emotions (fear, passion, revenge), violent actions (betrayal, fratricide, suicide, murder) and tremendous contrasts (the cross-cutting between the church ceremonies and the bloody mob murders in *Godfather II*). And the films often contain performances or theatrical sequences which, to varying degrees, reflect upon the film itself. Both the jungle in *Apocalypse Now* and the old West in *Heaven's Gate* constitute the background for such sequences (go-go dancers perform for the troops in Vietnam, the immigrants stage a cockfight), while in the Godfather films sequences of theater are closely interwoven with the narrative. Vito Corleone goes to see an Italian melodrama where he has his first glimpse of the neighborhood boss (dressed melodramatically in white as he would be in Sicily) whom he will have to kill to begin his own career; on his way to perform the deed he passes a puppet show of Sicilian marionettes jousting to the death; Michael Corleone learns his brother has betrayed him during a theatrical/erotic extravanganza in Havana. In addition to theatrical sequences, important moments are often staged as if they were theater. Vito prowls the New York streets like a latter-day Fantômas and, when he murders the old Don, overhead shots of the

APOCALYPSE NOW: *The go-go dancers sequence*

streets make it seem as if we are in an opera house: the murder itself is punctuated by ceremonial music and fireworks from a street festival. The first murder in *Heaven's Gate* is seen through a carefully composed hole in the tent which both frames it and suggests many of the other frames (archways, doorways) used in the film. Even the final "tableaux" of stage melodrama find their counterparts here in the family scenes of the Godfather films, the last scene of *The Deerhunter,* or the choral scenes of the immigrants at work in *Heaven's Gate,* all of which are carefully "staged," painterly, designed to imprint themselves upon our memory.

This emphasis upon theatricality is constantly heightened by dramatic lighting, composition, patterns of color and texture. To a certain extent, of course, these have always represented crucial elements in melodrama; in the words of Thomas Elsaesser: "Considered as an expressive code, melodrama might therefore be described as a particular form of dramatic *mise-en-scène,* characterized by a dynamic use of spatial and musical categories, as opposed to intellectual or literary ones." And, in this code, dramatic values are "sublimated into decor, colour, gesture and composition of frame.[5] This is more true than ever in these films where the visual motifs are given such weight they often create a subtext of their own which seems to affect us in a subconscious way: the various locations in *The Deerhunter* create a kind of symphony of reds and blues (the red fires of the steel mill, of the bombs in Vietnam, and the bandanas and blood of the Russian roulette players, the blue of the small town) which merge in the final scene with the American flag, just as the browns and sepia tones, or the repeated shots of water (New York Harbor, the ocean surrounding Cuba, Lake Tahoe) give a special patina to *Godfather II.*

While these motifs may play a more extensive and sophisticated role than they did in earlier films, they are not new. But what is new in these films is the way spectacle, or sequences of spectacle, are intercut with the narrative. In thise sense, the films are closer to opera, where the choruses or arias stop and fix the onward narrative flow, than to, say, the films of a Visconti where the narrative is conveyed through spectacle, and where every sequence is part of the spectacle which envelops reality as it does film. In this respect, it is noteworthy that a number of these films are actually structured like opera. *Apocalypse Now* begins with a kind of overture as it shows scenes of the misty jungle, proceeds to Act I—Martin Sheen receiving his orders; Act II—the trip up the river; and Act III—Heart of Darkness, the encounter with Brando-Kurtz.[6] The overture and finale of *The Deerhunter* are set in the small town and the steel mill while the major acts unfold in Vietnam; in *Heaven's Gate* both the overture and the finale are separated from the rest of the action by distance and by decades.

Of course, the weight and even the function accorded spectacle, or the balance between spectacle and narrative if you will, is not the same in all these films. In this respect, the two films about Vietnam are quite different from each other. In *Apocalypse Now,* the narrative is virtually a pretext for one spectacle scene after another: the helicopter raid (to Wagnerian music), the surfers on the river, the surrealistic camp of the demented Brando-Kurtz. In this nightmarish world, the horror of Vietnam has become a pretext for spectacle: the jungle and burning cities appear as a Dantesque inferno often endowed with a strange beauty of its own. The opening scenes of the misty jungle entrance us visually while the final scene of flaming reds and yellows resembles an abstract painting. Psychology and verisimilitude have been displaced by symbolism and myth: the journey up the river, which makes little sense in terms of modern strategic warfare, is a mythic journey to the deepest realm of the self, to the ultimate horror. While spectacle and symbolism are also present in *The Deerhunter* (one has only

Wedding "overture": THE DEERHUNTER

to think of its jungle scenes, or those of Russian roulette, or those which surround the killing of the deer), unlike *Apocalypse Now,* it is also firmly tied to an American genre (small town friends who go off to war), and to a fairly strong narrative which involves the realistic depiction of place and people. The powerful scenes of war constitute an alien world which contrasts with the scenes at home. And, it may well be that *The Deerhunter* was able to touch a much deeper chord in audiences than *Apocalypse Now* precisely because it was rooted in a reality with which audiences could identify.

Both the Godfather films and *Heaven's Gate* are also rooted, significantly, in archtypal American genres (the gangster film and the Western) and they too intercut scenes of spectacle with the narrative as does *The Deerhunter.* Thus, for example, while the wedding scene in *Godfather I* plays a role which has some functions that are narrative (it introduces us to the major characters) or social (it sets up the ethnicity of the Corleone family), what strikes us most about this sequence is its formal qualities (the sunlight wedding contrasting with the dark interiors) which create a kind of subtext reinforcing the film's theme of claustrophobia and power.

Of all the films, it is in *Heaven's Gate* where sequences of spectacle are given their greatest weight—far more weight and length, in all probability, than ever before in American film. There, while the swirling, vertiginous dances at Harvard Yard which occur towards the beginning may create a mood, they serve little narrative purpose; instead, as we'll see, they are there to be echoed formally later in the film. Here, too, the gains of spectacle seem to be made at the expense of narrative conventions which are treated very casually. (This unusual balance may be one of the reasons, in fact, that the film's initial reception was disastrous; in any case, it was largely these sequences of spectacle which were omitted or drastically cut in the shortened version of the film.) Audiences used to conventional narrative cannot help but wonder how a man, last seen at a Harvard graduation, turns up as a sheriff on the frontier twenty years later.[7] Or why his Harvard sweetheart would wait thirty years to marry him—thirty years in which she does not age at all. In addition to characters who are not really introduced, to an absence of explicit psychology (one can only guess at motives), scenes which would be emphasized in a conventional narrative (for example, the first murder of the immigrants)

HEAVEN'S GATE: *The graduation waltz*

go by so quickly that the audience hardly grasps them on first viewing, and the purpose of other, even lengthy scenes (such as the hero's intervention during a cockfight staged by the immigrants) is never really clear. Still other scenes, including the long valedictory address, only become clear in retrospect. Instead of one climactic battle scene, virtually the last hour of the film is devoted to a series of almost unendurable defeats. Narrative conventions are so totally broken, in fact, and expectations so thwarted, that without prior knowledge of the story it takes a very long while before the subject of the film is clear. And the break with narrative conventions is often matched by spatial dislocations. Not only do the battle scenes generate a sense of confusion (it's not clear where anyone is coming from, or going to) but smoke from guns and explosions often obscures any sense of depth so that the figures appear flattened. Renaissance space and narrative conventions have given way to a mythic world of visual icons.

In the past it has been suggested that American film's traditional emphasis on narrative progression—on acts and consequences—revealed a given ideology or world view; in the words of Thomas Elsaesser, the transformation of "spatial and temporal sequences . . . into consequences," the "continuum of cause and effect" in classical American film meant that one was "secure in the knowledge that the scenes fitted into each other like cogwheels in a clock-work, and that all visual information was purposive, inflected towards a plenitude of significance, saturated with clues that explained motivation and character. Out of conflict, contradiction and contingency the narrative generated order, linearity and articulated energy."[8] Along similar lines, other critics have linked the narrative thrust in earlier American films to an ideology of progress. But if this is true, or even partially true, then the diminished role accorded narrative in these recent films, as well as the fact that the diegesis is constantly cut by spectacle, can be seen as indicators of an ideological shift whereby the "plenitude of significance," the "order, linearity and articulated energy," if they survive at all, have been greatly weakened, and have given way to a loss of belief in action, a sense that the individual can no longer control his own life.

This theoretical link between formal considerations and ideology is certainly buttressed by the mood of these films which is one of

moral nihilism, inevitability and decline. As is often the case is melodrama, the individual seems impotent, caught in a web of destiny which encourages a kind of voluptuous pessimism. A late-Romantic infatuation with the irrational and with death consumes Michael Corleone in the Godfather films as well as Nick in *The Deerhunter*. Like a certain strand of fin-de-siècle literature and art, these films often revel in the grotesque or the pathological. This is especially true of the two films set in Vietnam where war is no longer a testing ground for heroism but a maelstrom of madness and violence. Abnormality reigns in Brando-Kurtz's mad kingdom, reeking of dismembered heads and a savage exoticism, where the final murder is a kind of homoerotic dance, a late romantic marriage of thanatos and eros. The hero of *The Deerhunter* risks his life not to save his friend from the enemy (as in earlier war films) but from a drug-induced obsession with death which compels him to the Russian roulette table in what is probably the strongest scene of the film. Even in those films less prone to emphasize the grotesque, the climate is still one of decline and despair where the individual is prey to murderous forces.

Ultimately, this climate reflects that which haunted a post-Vietnam America which no longer believed in its future or even, for that matter, in what could be seen as the accepted view of its past. It is not coincidental that the rereading of America's past which emerges from some of these films is bleak indeed. The rise of the Mafia family in the Godfather films, for example, has been seen as a parable about the ruthless course of capitalist America.[9] This may well be so but, in addition, Michael's somewhat inexplicable evolution from gallant World War II veteran (when we first meet him he is in uniform) to cold-blooded killer (by the end of the film he tells us that "if History has taught us anything, it's that you can kill anyone") can also be seen as a metaphor for the America that went from its heroic role in the Second World War to the horror of Vietnam. What is seen as self-preservation at the beginning ends in murderous paranoia as Michael slaughters even those who can no longer do him harm. The specter of Vietnam informs the film's sense that enemies can be anywhere and that no one can be trusted, while the lone figure of Michael shrouded in darkness at the end suggests the very lonely, powerful yet impotent America which emerged from the war.

In *Heaven's Gate,* the references to the war in Southeast Asia are more explicit and inescapable, the revisionist view of America's past bleaker, the indictment of United States policy perhaps the strongest ever seen in mainstream film. Its very theme raises the question of class exploitation since it concerns the massacre of homesteading immigrants, who embody a peaceful force in most Westerns, at the hands of rich cattle barons and their mercenary killers who are aided not only by the US Army (the American flag which once signalled that aid was on the way now suggests that murder is about to begin), but by the President himself. Their villanous leader, dressed melodramatically in Russian fur hat and long black coat, tells us that his family includes a governor, a former Secretary of State and a Secretary of War. This official war-machine will crush any individual who gets in its way. Devoid of the solidarity and hope for the future offered by the Marxist perspective in *1900,* lacking perforce that film's catharsis, the film's pessimism becomes almost unbearable. Its beaten and lonely hero (the ties of friendship—so crucial to *The Deerhunter*—have been undermined here by political differences and sexual rivalry) is thrice destroyed as in a kind of epic poem: the homesteading immigrants he is helping are massacred, the woman he loves is murdered, and even the personal integrity granted the Western hero is denied him for, at the end, he is a drained shell of a man, drifting aimlessly on his yacht off Newport Beach. The film's rhythm is one of inevitable decline, a decline broken only by sequences which, in one way or another, have to break the diegesis.

But if the sequences of spectacle break the diegetic flow, they also—and this is true of all the films—reinforce major themes. What makes the "message" of *Heaven's Gate* more powerful than, say, that of other "anti-Westerns" (*A Man Called Horse, Tell Them Willie Boy is Here, Soldier Blue, Little Big Man*), which give an imperialist cast to their reading of America's past in the light of Vietnam, is due not only to its epic proportions (length, beauty, sweep) and allusions to class warfare,

HEAVEN'S GATE: *The immigrants arrive in Casper.*

but to the way it manipulates spectacle. Its musical and visual motifs create and reinforce a sense of tremendous loss, a mood of total despair and hopelessness. Mention has been made of the circle motif, accompanied by the same musical strains, which occurs at important points throughout the film. In the words of a French critic, Michael Henry:

> The circle motif structures the *mise-en-scène* of groups. A privileged form of ritual, it [the circle motif] dominates each of these episodes: at Harvard where the Blue Danube Waltz first involves three rings of dancers waltzing in opposite directions (rings enlivened by the dips and swings made by each couple) and then two new, exclusively masculine rings which form around the May Tree; at Sweetwater [on the frontier] where the motif recurs in the rare moments of euphoria (Ella's crazy horse and carriage adventure, the cock fight in the smoky backroom, the roller-skaters' ball . . .); lastly, in the final battle where the murderers are encircled by the immigrants' wagons which are, in turn, encircled by the Cavalry."[10]

Like the repetition of music, each successive visual echo imprints itself more strongly upon our sensibility than the preceding ones since it resonates with what we have already seen. Each time the circle motif recurs, it evokes the terrible contrast between the idealism and spontaneity of the opening and the subsequent disillusion and despair. The repetition of key family gatherings and celebrations in the Godfather films punctuate and accent the sense of decline in a similar manner. The first scene showing the family united and at peace remains in our mind and is the standard by which we judge, and lament, each successive reunion which reveals the growing decay in family bonds.

The implicit comparison between past and present evoked by resonant motifs or recurring sequences (or, in the case of *Godfather II,* by explicit cross-cutting between scenes which depict the rise of the first, immigrant, Godfather and that of his son, Michael) gives rise in these films (with the exception of *Apocalypse Now*) to a mood of overwhelming nostalgia for an America that has been lost, for the American dream gone astray or betrayed. The explicit lament for the "Good Gone Days" in *Heaven's Gate* haunts all these films. The depiction of immigrant groups in the Godfather films and in the two films by Cimino may reflect the directors' background, but it also plays on the mythology of an America seen as the savior of the needy and the poor. Not only has that America disappeared, but in the wake of the seventies we are led to ask whether it ever existed. The beautiful Western landscape of *Heaven's Gate* has lost none of the mythical power it had in former Westerns, but it has become the breeding ground not of justice but of massacre and class warfare. The contrast between the present and the "golden age" from which we are

Kris Kristofferson skates with Isabelle Huppert: HEAVEN'S GATE

forever exiled—a world of hope epitomized in the lyrical opening of *Heaven's Gate* celebrating America's rebirth after the trauma of the Civil War—is conveyed by powerful color and visual motifs. As Michael Henry has observed, in *Heaven's Gate* a "network of correspondences, antitheses, and internal rimes" links the opening, idealistic scene at Harvard with the scenes on the frontier: i.e., scene of the ranked graduates is echoed by the procession of miserable immigrants, the student choruses by the foreign chants of the workers, the candlelit faces of the beautiful young girls by those of the prostitutes.[11] In the Godfather films, the golden-hued New York scenes depicting the life of the old Don (with its moments of hope, generosity, warmth) shine luminously in comparison with the America of his son Michael whose total loss of values and human feeling is mirrored in his bleak Nevada estate; the teeming New York streets have given way to an isolated, policed compound.

One of the central visual motifs of both *Godfather II* and *Heaven's Gate* enhances the sense of loss created by these contrasts between past and present, or between landscape and events. Both films play on the theme of photography which is imbued, per se, with a deep nostalgia, with an aching sense of the past: in the words of Susan Sontag, "Photographs promote nostalgia. Photography is an elegiac art, a twilight art . . . All photographs are momenti mori."[12] The New York scenes in *Godfather II* recall photographs by reason of their golden hues and soft focus as well as by their accompanying subtitles such as "Ellis Island, 1901." The sepia tones of early photographs also characterize certain scenes in *Heaven's Gate* where, in addition, photography is actually brought into the narrative. Somewhat inexplicably, the hero keeps by his bedside a photograph of himself and his youthful love (a photograph which constantly suggests the idealism and romance of the beginning) while the hard-working immigrants find time to pose for a photographer. In this film, the golden/sepia tones bathe not only the rare moments of release and happiness epitomized by the square dance but also the dreadful scenes of massacre, almost as if these should have been, and now are, photographed for posterity. Is this deliberate or unconscious? Is the film commenting upon its own role as a maker or, in this case, as a debunker of photographs/myths?

But in the very strength with which spectacle creates nostalgia there lies a certain danger. For unlike Verdi's operas which raised people to political passion, the mood of these films gently persuades us that all idealism is empty, all action futile, history and historical awareness unimportant. And the resulting emptiness is all too easily filled by a voluptuous nostalgia, and by the problematical myths and ideological confusion that may have contributed to the perceived decline. This is very clear, for example, in the two war films which, almost certainly inadvertently, are tainted with the ugly racism that characterized the

war itself. Brando-Kurtz performs as a white god to teeming Asian masses, while the sadistic Vietcong torturers in *The Deerhunter* would not have felt out of place in a Hollywood film about World War II. *Heaven's Gate* creates a great ambivalence in the audience when it gradually reveals that the slaughtered immigrants, innocent victims who should elicit all our sympathy, are for the most part, weak, cowardly and crude, totally in contrast with the altruistic hero who is (incidentally?) a wealthy man. Cimino has remarked that this portrayal of the immigrants was designed to show them as a "new class which is ready to collaborate, to imitate the stockgrowers. The circle closes once again."[13] But I'm not sure that this message, pessimistic as it is, comes through. I think, rather, that we begin—however uneasily—to share the class-inspired scorn the cattle barons feel for those newly arrived masses, and to ask ourselves if democracy and justice for such people is worth defending. The collapse of the American ideal is twofold: historical, since an almost official slaughter occurs, and philosophical, since all idealism is made to seem empty.

Of course, it's also possible that the political ambivalences in these films, in addition to their mood of nostalgia, held a deep appeal for a nation that had been deeply traumatized and defeated for the first time. With *The Deerhunter* we could both condemn war (perhaps even Vietnam) and be touched by an old-fashioned patriotism which had become suspect, while the Godfather films allowed us to criticize contemporary America and yet wax elegiac about a lost world of family values. And *Heaven's Gate* encouraged a postwar cynicism since its overwhelming pessimism suggests that any struggle against the system is futile. This ambivalence also meant that while the overt message of the Godfather films or *Heaven's Gate* might be leftist, the myths upon which they draw (Power and Patriarchy in the one case, Romantic Heroism in the other) could have a reactionary tone. Built into the powerful formal fabric of the film, it is this tone which emerges victorious. The result is that spectacle encourages us to lament the past, to forget history, and to luxuriate in spectacle for its own sake.

NOTES

1. Frank Rahill, *World of Melodrama* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1967), p. 15.
2. Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama," *Monogram,* No. 4 (1972), p. 4.
3. Mark Le Fanu, "Pageants of Violence: Problems on the Staging of History," *Monogram,* No. 6 (October, 1975), pp. 6-7.
4. Le Fanu, p. 11.
5. Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury," p. 6.
6. See Ruth McCormick's review of the film in *Cineaste,* Fall, 1979.
7. In an interview with Kris Kristofferson, the critic Charles Champlin was moved to to ask if the actor had any ideas about what his character did in the intervening years!
8. Elsaesser, "The Pathos of Failure: American Films in the 1970's," *Monogram,* No. 6 (1975), p. 13.
9. John Hess, "*Godfather II:* A Deal Coppola Couldn't Refuse," in *Movies and Methods,* ed. by Bill Nichols (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), pp. 81-90.
10. Michael Henry, "Le rêve perverti: de *The Deerhunter* à *Heaven's Gate,*" *Positif,* No. 246 (September, 1981), p. 13.
11. Ibid.
12. Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Delta, 1977), p. 15.
13. From an interview with Michel Ciment and Michael Henry published in *Positif,* No. 246 (September, 1981), p. 19.

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BRUCE KAWIN

An Outline of Film Voices

In his recent *FQ* article, "Tense, Mood, and Voice in Film: Notes after Genette," Brian Henderson initiated a stimulating attempt to rethink film narration in terms suggested by his reading of Gerard Genette's *Narrative Discourse*. While I agree with him that the problem of narration—of who says what and how it gets said—is fundamental, and a useful site for interrelating our understandings of literature and film, I remain disturbed by his discussion of point of view and voice-over narration—particularly with his implication that they and subjective camera account for most of what could be called first person cinematic narration—and with some of his remarks about what can and cannot happen in literature and film. What I should like to do here is to take issue with a few specific points raised in that article, and then go on to present an expansion of my argument in *Mindscreen*[1] concerning film voices.

It is important to remember that discourse, whether in words or in images, can be magical, transformative, even when one is involved in making academically precise distinctions. Noting that Huw, the voice-over narrator of *How Green Was My Valley,* does not seem to age while those around him do, Henderson says, "The duration of the plot and that implied by the performance level are contradictory, something that could not happen in literature." This is, however, one way of describing precisely what happens in the first scene of *Hamlet,* where ten minutes of unbroken action take the story from midnight to dawn. It would be more accurate to say that language has ways to avoid introducing such a level of contradiction and that it can also happily manipulate paradoxical discontinuities should it be called upon to do so.

Henderson goes on to argue that when Huw is not heard voice-over or his visual perspective is not adopted by the camera, the film is proceeding "in an objective way." While the voice-over is certainly used in that film to inform the audience at the outset and rather blatantly just who is the narrator, that announcement carries with it the expectation (which the audience comes to trust) that the film as a whole is intended and will continue to reflect a coherent and personalized perspective (Huw's), unless distinct signals are given to the contrary. Narrative discontinuity is not the normative expectation but the complicated exception, or at least that would be the case once the possibility of coherent narrative structure, with its option of creative and coherent—i.e., readable—discontinuity, has been understood by critics and theorists and accepted as a viable option by film-makers. In *How Green Was My Valley, Double Indemnity, Dead of Night,* etc., the narrative focus does not blur simply because the voice-over is not there to hold the audience's hand at every moment, as it might in a sentence from which the pronouns had been deleted. In a film like *Lady in the Lake,* the ever-present subjective camera becomes an oppressive reminder, as the ever-present first-person pronouns in the novel of the same name do not; the repeated subjectivity code is oppressive partly because it is not necessary to our understanding.

There is a significant difference between an angle of vision and an experiential or moral perspective. Henderson writes:

> Older Huw is the narrator of *How Green Was My Valley*—it is literally his voice that we hear; but this does not control the question of mood. We almost never see things from young Huw's visual perspective. *How Green* is non-focalized in that no sequence, let alone the whole film, is shot from any one character's perspective. It is variably focalized in that it frequently borrows a character's perspective for one or more shots. . . . Huw's arrival at school is shot in a non-focalized way; he is small and timid in the hallway but no character is looking at him in this way.

The character looking at Huw this way, I would suggest, is the older Huw—the narrator—presenting his impression of how he looked at the time. (The same logic covers his presenting how he says others saw him and the valley.) The fact that the first-person narrator of

Madame Bovary disappears after the opening schoolroom scene would not lay him open to the charge of being a mere narrative convenience or puppet who has, as Henderson says of vanishing voice-over narrators, an elaborate wind-up but "nothing to pitch." Ishmael often vanishes from *Moby-Dick,* presents information he could not have obtained firsthand, etc., and is at the center of a brilliantly sustained and coherent narrative drive. What we have in *How Green Was My Valley* is the story of his youth as the older Huw tells and remembers it, complete with his ability to concentrate now on himself and now on the people around him. His life, like his tale, is a matter not just of what he saw through his eyes (subjective camera) but also of what he came to know. It is both too particular and too literal to insist that every perspective be anchored by a gaze, of person or of camera, in order to be understood. When Henderson says that "The puppet narrators of cinema . . . may have integrity as characters but they have no integrity as narrators, no resistance to the demands placed on them," he is forgetting about hundreds of narrative *tours de force,* from *Caligari* to *Marienbad.* Even if there were not examples available of cinematic narrators with integrity and "something to pitch," it would still be suspect for Henderson or anyone else to write as if complex and viable cinematic narrators *could not* exist, because of some inherent limit in film as a narrative system.

Both film and literature are organized expressions, and what they can do or present depends on the characteristics of their respective signifying systems or "languages." Without getting into linguistic arguments about double and triple articulation, or brain-lateralization theories about verbal *vs.* spatial information-processing, it remains evident that film has no discrete pronouns and that words and pictures have different ways of presenting information and of establishing narrative or anti-narrative frames of reference.

Because people often think in words, and of course speak in them, there is a natural association between first-person discourse and first-person experience; it is easy to imagine a speech-act as telling what a speaker wants to tell. But when subjective camera adopts the position of a character's eyes and offers that as an equivalent to first-person discourse, the analogy is forced, for although visual experience is as appropriate to film expression as verbal expression is to writing, the eyes are passive organs of reception, not of expression, and it is not natural to *tell* by *seeing.* We may share Bruno's perspective as he is slugged in the face by Guy, in *Strangers on a Train,* but that is not the same as feeling that, for the length of that shot, Bruno was explicitly telling us about that experience; the former interpretation—that we share his perspective for a while—is the more "natural," one based on a normative construct of the function of the eye. To introduce the concept of telling into the passive system of vision, some encoding is necessary. There must be ways to establish whether deliberate, personalized narration is taking place, whether a given view is objective or subjective, whether whatever subjectivity does appear is authorial, and so on. And in the interest of sustained narrative complexity, there ought to be a more useful and comprehensive master code available than that of "POV and voice-over for subjectivity, everything else for objectivity."

The evidence of film history is that such a master code does exist, and in *Mindscreen* I attempted to sort out its first-person structures. One thing that emerged from that study, and which needs to be emphasized here, is that these codes and subcodes are not inflexible; they are often creatively redefined by film-makers and need to be understood in the contexts of particular films. In some cases, a firmly and consistently established narrative structure can instruct the audience how to interpret the film; this is the case in *Dead of Night, 8½, Life Upside Down, The Wizard of Oz,* and *Rashomon.* In other, more ambiguous cases, it may be necessary to interpret the film as a whole before one can establish, in relation to this larger structure, the likelihood of a given effect's having had a certain narrative intent.

In the case of the subjective camera slugging in *Strangers on a Train,* for example, the first thing one might look for is any evidence that Bruno acts as the narrator of the film as a whole, and as it turns out, there is no such evidence. From the very start, when the camera divides its attention equally between Guy's and Bruno's shoes as they converge, to the

end, when the story continues after Bruno's death, what evidence there is is on the side of an authorial, third-person narrative mode, a camera that is equally outside both characters and that is letting the audience in on an interesting story. Within this structure, the camera toys with letting the audience share—momentarily—the interior perspectives of the central characters. Sometimes we see what they see (subjective camera), and sometimes we see or hear what they think or hallucinate (mindscreen). At times Hitchcock uses the same camera set-up to convey objective and subjective views (the slugging sequence, Bruno's meeting with Babs at the country club, etc.), and what emerges from that apparent muddle is a brilliant game, conveying the unsettling sensation that any point of view can suddenly be appropriated by a subjectivity whose perspective may prove abnormal, and thus advancing the picture's general theme about the darkness that hides within what we might like to think of as a safe and stable social and psychological norm (which is comparable to the objective norm of the third-person shot). The larger point to be gleaned from such an analysis is that in any film, the camera's view is always a *potential* field of view, capable of being appropriated or defined according to the intentions of the film-maker. As long as he or she insures that the visual field is defined in a manner the audience can follow, the film-maker is free to experiment with ways of achieving such definition. Although the number of possible film voices is not infinite, there is no necessary limit on the ways those voices may be encoded.

The issue is not one of pronouns, nor of recognizing formulas and graving them in stone (like the current, inaccurate assumption that the subjective camera shot is necessarily bracketed by objective shots, usually of the looker, and is not otherwise comprehensible). The question is one of *voice,* and it provides a very useful link between the discursive structures of language and cinema. Words and film share the ability to personalize discourse, to give the impression that someone or some category of voice is telling, presenting, falsifying, arranging—in short, narrating—the text, regardless of what kind of text it is. These practices are found in narrative, nonfiction, animated, and avant-garde films, regardless of period. There is something in the cinematic system, be it ever so visual, that corresponds to voice in both commonplace and complex organizations of spoken and written language, even if the eye cannot speak.

Mindscreen was concerned almost entirely with first-person voices. In recent years, more and more critical attention has been devoted to sorting out the first-person aspects of third-person narration (as in the problem of Hitchcock's personal attitude toward Scotty in *Vertigo,* or Ford's vision of the history of the West), and so to forestall a critical muddle it seemed important to suggest some distinctions among kinds of third-person narration. What then stood in the way of a comprehensive rhetoric, or at least of a full-fledged cinematic equivalent to the pronominal code, was the concept of second person, since it is hard to imagine anything as impersonal as a film in the act of talking about or directly to the audience. Most second-person prose, however, is just as impersonal as film; what both do is to take a position of addressing or describing a "you" who is absent and largely unknown, and who may or may not be listening carefully or willing to respond (which might be like answering mail addressed to "Occupant"). Leaving personal letters and direct speech aside, second person is primarily an "as if" discourse, and has the same characteristics whether or not it accurately describes its audience, whether it remains unpublished or in the can. Beyond that, there is no reason except the economic to prevent a film's being made for a particular, known, even single audience—like the mindscreen tape that the husband in *Brainstorm* creates for his wife, or those project-oriented films shown to businessmen in certain conferences, or a poetic film one might make only for himself although others may be invited to look at it. There is room for argument about whether second person ought to be set in the context of the pronominal code, as I am doing, or within the larger domain of rhetoric, so that what might be involved would be a shift not from third to second person, but from the declarative to the imperative. Not all the second-person instances outlined below, however, are in the form of commands, and the possibility of interactive modes has little or nothing

to do with the imperative, and so for the time being I will persist in this formulation.

A first-person film or shot tells "my" version of what happened, whether or not it happened to "me," whether or not the action or percept is completed and whether or not "I" am aware of sharing this version with anyone. A second-person film or shot tells "you" what to do, involves "you" in the narrative project, or attempts to engage "you" in a version of conversation. A third-person film or shot tells what happened or is happening to "them." The following is a short outline of film voices, arranged in order of increasing complexity within each of these categories, with sound being left for last not because it is most complex but in order to keep the arrangement as simple as possible.

I. **FIRST PERSON**
   - A. **Subjective Camera**
   - B. **Point of View**
   - C. **Mindscreen**
   - D. **Self-Consciousness or Reflexivity**
     1. *Authorial Self-Consciousness*
     2. *Systemic Self-Consciousness*
   - E. **Sound**
     1. *Voice-Over Narration*
     2. *Subjective Sound*

II. **SECOND PERSON**
   - A. **One-Way Address**
     1. *Neutral Monologue*
     2. *Persuasion*
        - a. Propaganda
        - b. Commercials
        - c. Other Coercive Narrative Projects
     3. *Intimate Discourse*
   - **B. Interactive Dialogue**
   - C. **Sound**

III. **THIRD PERSON**
   - A. **Neutral Presentation**
   - B. **Perspectival Presentation**
     1. *Single Author*
     2. *Multiple Authors*
     3. *Ideology as Author*
   - C. **Sound**

I. **FIRST PERSON:**

A. **Subjective Camera** (share my eyes). This is sometimes called the point-of-view shot (POV). The camera attempts to imitate the exact visual experience of the narrator (*Lady in the Lake*) or viewing subject (Bruno as Guy hits him).

B. **Point of View** (share my perspective, my emphases). Although the mode of presentation is apparently objective, the audience is restricted for part or all of a film to the experience of a single character and learns information much as that character does (*The Big Sleep, La Chienne*), though dramatic irony is always possible (*Vertigo, All That Heaven Allows*).

C. **Mindscreen** (share my mind's eye). The audience sees what a narrator tells or invents or deliberately presents as his own experience (*Rashomon, Annie Hall, Dead of Night*), or what a character who is not in a deliberately narrating posture personally experiences as an imaginary reality, hallucination, thought, vision, or dream (*The Wizard of Oz,* the framing story in *Dead of Night*). When the actress in *Hiroshima mon amour* remembers her German lover, that shot is not simply a flashback (an objective cutting back to an earlier part of the story, showing in an impersonal manner what happened at that time) but a mindscreen that presents her memory of the event. In *Brainstorm,* since it is the brain and not only the eye whose perspective is shared, the "full sensory tapes" are recorded mindscreens, distinguished from normal visual experience not only by the science fiction premise and by a number of subjectivity-establishing shots but also by a change in lens, aspect ratio, and image clarity.

D. **Self-Consciousness or Reflexivity** (share my awareness that this is a discourse or artifice).

1. *Authorial Self-Consciousness.* The film-maker (real or as a persona) makes it clear that he is aware of creating a discourse within the context of other discourses, sometimes undermining the audience's suspension of disbelief and taking the stage in the process. One recognizes an authorial level of commentary or interference when the character "Jaws" bites a shark in *The Spy Who Loved Me,* when Hitchcock is excluded from the bus at the start of *North by Northwest,* or when

Pudovkin quotes *Intolerance* in *Mother.*

2. *Systemic Self-Consciousness.* The film itself appears to be aware of the fact that it is a deliberate discourse—or a resonant center of consciousness within the narrative structure appears to be aware of being presented within a deliberate discourse—and this imitative awareness is not passed back to the real or implied author. The system appears to narrate itself, almost as if it had consciousness, so that what the audience sees in this case is the film's mindscreen (*Persona, Tout va bien*). The term also applies to such radical uses of mindscreen as that in *Dead of Night,* where the reflexive mindscreen of the principal narrator appears to be aware of the ways it corresponds to the terms of the horror film, and within which a character who is not the dreamer compares her situation to that in *Through the Looking-Glass,* advancing the (correct) notion that she may simply be a character in the principal narrator's dream. Throughout *Dead of Night,* the parallel between being in an altered state and being in a movie (i.e., being an element in a discourse) is understood from within the system.

E. **Sound.** In contemporary film-making, sound applies integrally to all categories and is able to rely on the pronominal code of spoken language. Not to belabor the obvious, I will leave dialogue spoken by characters out of this, unless that character is also a narrator. The point here is to address those uses of sound that specifically help to define or clarify the narrative structure.

1. *Voice-Over Narration* (listen to my words). The narrator speaks to the real or fictive audience but is not shown while speaking. This is often used in conjunction with mindscreen, as in *Rebecca,* and sometimes with authorial self-consciousness, as in *2 or 3 Things I Know About Her.* In some cases the film-maker will narrate the film voice-over, as Bergman does briefly and more or less anonymously in *Persona,* and sometimes he will make sure that the audience recognizes that his voice is authorial, as Orson Welles does in *The Magnificent Ambersons* (particularly in the closing credits, which he narrates) or as producer Mark Hellinger does at the start of *The Naked City. The Cabinet of Dr. Caligari* is an example of the equivalent of voice-over in silent film, where the visuals are interrupted by first-person, past-tense title cards.

2. *Subjective Sound* (share my ears). The audience hears what the character or narrator hears, remembers hearing, or imagines he hears (as Bruno hears "The Band Played On" when he looks at Babs in *Strangers on a Train*). This can of course include silence, as in Gance's *Un Grand amour de Beethoven* (silence as deafness).

II. **SECOND PERSON:**

A. **One-Way Address** (now hear this!). The film addresses the audience directly, as if aware of its presence, but the audience cannot talk back. To the extent that it is called upon to respond, to learn, to change its attitude toward the material being presented, to obey commands, to listen, etc, the audience—or the rhetorical expectation that there will be an audience that will be called upon to react in some or all of these ways—is part of the narrative structure of the film.

1. *Neutral Monologue* (you might find this of interest). Material is presented, almost as in a lecture, to a personalized audience. In first-person voice-over narration, the narrator is primarily concerned with his own experience or tale (*Rebecca*), or helping the system to find personalized expression or to describe itself (*The Naked City*); in second-person neutral monologue, whether or not voice-over is involved, the narrative or rhetorical emphasis is on the act of addressing the audience, not just of speaking or telling in a vacuum. The presenter can be unemotional about his subject, as in your average instructional documentary, or passionately involved, but he is in either case projecting a definite relationship with his audience. This relationship is not coercive; hence the term "neutral." What distinguishes this from third-person neutral presentation is that in this case the audience feels personally addressed by the film and will not be comfortable adopting an entirely detached attitude (an attitude that might be appropriate when watching a third-person film). What is coercive, even in this neutral case, is the structure of address itself, the rhetoric of the situation. There are various ways of establishing such a relationship with an audience. In some narrative films a character might be addressed in the second person

by the voice-over narrator—"You think this is going to be an ordinary day, don't you, Mr. Jones. Well . . . "—and the audience enters the narrative system by identifying with that character, sharing the position of addressee. Rod Serling's voice-overs for the *Twilight Zone* series often addressed the audience personally and directly: "Picture if you will . . ."

2. *Persuasion.* In this case, the presenter clearly wants the audience to be won over to a certain attitude or position, and perhaps to act on it.

a. *Propaganda* (you will believe that this is true).

b. *Commercials* (you should want this and buy it).

The distinction between propaganda and commercials (and, indeed, the coercive documentary or narrative film) is largely one of genre rather than voice, but also relates to the commercial and/or political context for which a film is made. It could be argued that in the present political situation, where economics and ideology are so inevitably intertwined, there may be no difference between propaganda and commercials, so that a Calvin Klein ad, an Air Force recruiting ad, the CBS Evening News, a patriotic documentary on the Unknown Soldier, and *Flashdance* might all be conveying essentially the same message in different genres, "selling" the "American way" just as *Triumph of the Will* and *Jud Süss* each promoted Nazi ideology. The difference which, as an aspect of voice, does separate propaganda from commercials is that of tone: the manner or mood in which the coercive discourse takes place. Even so, it might be appropriate to allow for generic differences within this category, adding the coercive documentary whose interests are not necessarily those of the State (distinguishing it from official propaganda), and the coercive narrative film (e.g., *Jud Süss*), keeping in mind that those voices are different, or have a different rhetorical project, from the "this is how I see it" attitude of first- or third-person perspectival voices. Thus:

c. *Other Coercive Narrative Projects.*

3. *Intimate Discourse* (you and I should examine this together). In this mode, which Francesco Casetti has called the "I and Thou," the film takes a less authoritarian and more personal tone when addressing the audience; the overall impression is that the film is trying to tell us something and that we have the option of making up our own minds, as in *Wind from the East.* Where the audience is encouraged to change its mind in a certain way in the persuasive mode, the audience of intimate discourse is left free to respond in any way and to arrive at any attitude. Sometimes paired with self-consciousness, intimate discourse includes such friendly or sarcastic "asides" to the audience as those often made by Groucho Marx and W. C. Fields (the saloon/soda-fountain scene in *Never Give a Sucker an Even Break*).

B. **Interactive Dialogue** (let's talk). The film addresses the audience directly, and the audience is able to "talk" back, either by altering the progress of the system (choosing a pathway on an interactive Laserdisc), feeding in responses (voting on a program's resolution, giving instructions through a computer), or yelling at the screen (*The Rocky Horror Picture Show* has become interactive in the course of its history). The greater the possibilities for authentically spontaneous response, the less easy it is to call this "a film," but the category nevertheless does exist, even if it wreaks havoc with conventional notions of closure. Some films allow for the possibility of audience response by including pauses (black leader and silence), creating time for the audience to think or to consider its response or to respond. In *Mr. Sardonicus,* producer William Castle pretended to allow the audience to vote on the fate of the villain; the audience was given glow-in-the-dark thumb cards and instructed (by Castle, on the screen) to hold them up or down while Castle pretended to count them, announced that the vote was against the villain, and then returned to the story to show Sardonicus's unhappy ending.[2] The most thoroughly realized interactive films were the "follow the bouncing ball" singalongs.

C. **Sound** (listen, you). Voice-over narration in the second person: "You'll like our beer," etc. For a silent-film equivalent, consider Eisenstein's titles urging the audience to "Learn the use of arms!" in *October.* Direct address, rather than voice-over, is common in asides.

III. **THIRD PERSON:**

A. **Neutral Presentation** (here it is). This is sometimes called "no-one's shot." The camera and projection apparatus re-present, as if with perfect objectivity, what is or was there to be shown. Even in a scientific film, such objectivity is an ideal category, but it has been taken, with some looseness, to be the basic method of "classical cinema." Either there is no foregrounded narrator, or the cinematic apparatus itself functions as an invisible narrator to which the audience is not supposed to pay particular attention. This category includes impersonal flashbacks and flashforwards as well as impersonal presentations of the real or fictive universe in the narrative present (*Footloose, The Ra Expeditions, Watering the Gardener*). The difference between this mode and second-person neutral monologue is in the film's expectation, conception, or degree of awareness of its audience—the terms of address.

B. **Perspectival Presentation** ("here" it is). There is an implied authorial perspective on what is shown; "authorial" here refers to the real point of origin of the discourse, whether that be a person, a studio, a mechanism, or a culture. This can also refer to a relatively free-floating, noticing, fictitious intelligence, like that of the camera that seeks out Rosebud in the furnace and finds it significant. The camera in *Citizen Kane* can be considered authorial in that it is the point of origin of the discourse, is not unalterably identified with any particular character at this point in the film, and does what Welles wanted it to. At times it appears to know as much about the situation as the author, while remaining as curious about it as the audience. What makes *Kane's* camera different from the norm—and the norm, in this case, is that the camera is the organ of the author's attention and intentions—is that *Kane's* appears self-directed, interested for its own reasons in "trespassing," going past closed doors, through a skylight, and eventually into this furnace as if to satisfy its own curiosity. Taken to its logical conclusion, this could be seen as a variant of systemic self-consciousness, and so the camera in *Rules of the Game* might serve as a less problematic example of the camera as a perspectival site.

1. *Single Author* (this is how I see it). Without taking center stage or undermining the audience's suspension of disbelief, the film-maker conveys a judgment or attitude toward the material being presented (Ford in *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance,* Hawks in *Bringing Up Baby,* Coppola in both *Godfather* films—but not in *Rumble Fish,* which is authorially self-conscious). For the literary equivalent, consider *Middlemarch, Oliver Twist,* or *The Bacchae.* Much of the "auteur theory" is devoted to identifying and interpreting this level of authorial commentary or favoritism. What distinguishes this from first-person authorial self-consciousness is that here the audience is not encouraged to think about the author or to suspend disbelief. At the end of *Stromboli,* Rossellini subtly expresses a judgment of the heroine's situation in perspectival third person, but at the end of *Voyage in Italy,* when the shadow of the crane enters the image, he makes sure the audience is aware that the judgment is that of the film-maker (authorial self-consciousness).

2. *Multiple Authors* (this is how we see it). It is rare for a film to be made and truly controlled by a single person or even to appeal back to a consistent perspective. (Although the converse is common in literature, which is usually written by a single author, there are examples of collaboration between authors—as in Nordhoff and Hall's *Bounty* trilogy—or between an author and one or more editors, as in the case of Thomas Wolfe's novels, or even between author/editors, as in Wordsworth and Coleridge's *Lyrical Ballads.*) This is the reality of the situation critically oversimplified by auteurists, and it suggests that coherence functions at a narratorial or systemic *level* rather than proceeding directly from the intentions of a particular artist, in other words that it is an aspect of having a structure. There are examples of collaboration that affected—if not effected—the value and narrative structures of finished films, such as Welles and Mankiewicz on *Citizen Kane,* and there are examples of creative conflict that were equally significant: Resnais and Robbe-Grillet are said to have disagreed about whether the seducer in *Marienbad* was lying, and the film can be seen to reflect this.

3. *Ideology as Author* (this is how it is). There are levels of control that affect meaning

in ways the film-maker may or may not be aware of and may or may not be able to do anything about. A picture of a bank may carry different implied meanings in capitalist and noncapitalist cultures, and this level of meaning may operate alongside or in contradiction to any other and more deliberately controlled authorial intentions. To be free of an ideology one has accepted as "natural," one might have to become a different person. These ideological interventions or overlayings can be deliberate, as in *Red Planet Mars,* or inadvertent, as in *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes.* The difference here depends on the extent to which the author is aware of subscribing to a particular ideology and either does or does not set out to construct a film that will reflect that ideology; in either case the film does reflect the ideology. Both types are programmatically less coercive than propaganda; that difference in tone may be the only thing that finally distinguishes the intentionally ideological third-person film (*Gentlemen's Agreement*) from a coercive narrative project like *Jud Süss* or the ending of *The Great Dictator.* The inadvertently ideological film is likely to be even less coercive, since the film-maker may be unaware of holding a position that needs to be argued; indeed, if the ideology is accepted as "natural," there may not be anything that the film-maker might want the audience to change or rethink. On the subject of inadvertence: in the case of *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* there are grounds for arguing that the ideological perspectives of artist and culture were congruent and that Hawks did not set out to make a self-consciously patriarchal statement about capitalism and coupling, complete with a "male" camera. There is a further level of inadvertence, amounting to an ideological imperative and phrased in those terms by Comolli and Narboni: "*Every film is political,* inasmuch as it is determined by the ideology that produces it."[3] This category, which obviously is capable of overlapping with any discursive mode, can usefully be focused on those cases where the artist cannot be said—as it could be said of Hawks—accidentally to have agreed with himself. Where it is most useful is in identifying a film that appears to have no author *except* that of the ideology of the culture that produced the film, i.e., where it doesn't matter who the real author was, because the dominant perspective has been created as if without the author's participation or interference. *Gentlemen Prefer Blondes* is not overwhelmed by the voice of ideology—Hawks's voice never entirely disappears—and the same is true of *October;* thus in these cases it is appropriate to speak of an intentional (Eisenstein) or inadvertent (Hawks) ideological authorial project, with the voice of ideology a variety of co-author or co-speaker, whereas in the case of *Flashdance,* which has no significant authorial voice, the third-person presentation reflects the perspective of contemporary Hollywood on a Horatio Alger binge, and that perspective only. In general, then, the difference among these three voices depends on whose perspective is most significantly being advanced: his (single author), theirs (multiple author), or "everybody's" (ideology).

C. **Sound.** Sounds are presented as if with perfect objectivity; the illusion is that the audience hears what is or was there to be heard. If there is a voice-over, it describes or relates the condition or history of him, her, it, or them in an apparently impersonal manner.

Those are the three major conventional modes of film discourse, but there are others, some of which are produced by the interaction or cross-fertilization of various simpler modes. There is, for example, something I have called "secondary first-person narration," which is at work in *Heart of Darkness,* where Marlow tells Kurtz's story by telling his own story.[4] The implied message is, "I present another's experience through the filter of my own experience," and what this opens up for film is a way to deal with certain highly experimental uses of found footage (*Night and Fog*), particularly when the other's footage is only one aspect of a complex narrative system; it also accounts for one device that was put to silly use in *Eyes of Laura Mars,* and intriguing use in *Brainstorm,* where "I see what another sees." These two approaches to secondary first-person narration overlap in Michelle Citron's *Daughter Rite,* where it becomes important to analyze the "look" implied by the father's home movies. But it is not necessary that found footage play a part in cinematic secondary first-person narration, and this is evident in Sally Potter's *Thriller,* where the

central character attempts to sort out her identity and the value structure of her personal and social history with reference to the figure of Mimi in *La Bohème*. A mode this intricate opens the whole question of bracketing and overlap—in other words, the true complexity of discourse and presentation.

It should be noted that all these voices allow for truthfulness, lying, analysis, and irony; that they often overlap; and that they make it possible to see how cinematic narration has the capacity to be as complex or as straightforward as verbal narration. It is that equivalence of range that has allowed film and literature to seek equivalent range as vehicles of human expression.

NOTES

1. Princeton: Princeton Univ. Press, 1978.
2. Harold Schechter and David Everitt, *Film Tricks: Special Effects in the Movies* (New York: Dial/Harlin Quist, 1980), p. 215.
3. Jean-Luc Comolli and Jean Narboni, "Cinema/Ideology/Criticism," in *Movies and Methods,* ed. Bill Nichols (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1976), pp. 24–25.
4. *The Mind of the Novel,* pp. 33–80.

Reviews

ACCEPTABLE LEVELS

A collective work produced by The Belfast Film Workshop and Frontroom Productions. Direction: John Davies, Alastair Herron, Kate McManus. Script: John Davies, Gordon Hahn, Ellin Hare, Alastair Herron, Kate McManus, Robert Smith. Camera: Ellin Hare, Robert Smith. Editing: Ellin Hare, Kate McManus. Music: Nick Garvey.

Unlike the Vietnam War and the Movement against the War in the USA, which with a few exceptions like *Medium Cool* were not treated in film until they were over, the ongoing Troubles in the North of Ireland have been the subject of a good number of films, television plays and dramas. Although none thus far has the stature or focus of a *La Hora de Los Hornos, Battle of Algiers, Z,* or *Rome Open City,* many have been of very high quality visually and dramatically (*Ascendency, Angel, Maeve, Writing on the Wall* and the television dramas of Graham Reid and Martin Lynch). It is significant, however, that nearly all British-financed films on Northern Ireland have tended to reinforce the status quo politically and culturally. For the most part they tend to be texts of despair, portraying people in the community as merely passive victims, their life as sound and fury signifying little or nothing, and the situation in the North of Ireland as impervious to political solution.

Acceptable Levels, a new film from and about Northern Ireland, analyzes how this myth is constructed in everyday cultural production. Like *Medium Cool,* it focuses on the ways in which the media report, construct, and interact with significant news events. Directed by John Davies in conjunction with Alistair Heron and Kate McManus of the Belfast Film and Video Workshop, *Acceptable Levels* has been shown at the London Film Festival, at the Cork Festival where it won an award, and on British network television (Channel 4) as well as in the cinemas. Equally important, Heron and McManus have taken the film back to the community in which it was made, organizing many successful showings in pubs and community centers.

Perhaps because only six of the performers in *Acceptable Levels* are professional, the remainder being people from the community, the film conveys the texture of working-class life in the Catholic areas—the daily activities and the strong sense of community and *Gemeinschaft* that prevails as well as the discrimination, unemployment and the human consequences of British military presence. At the same time *Acceptable Levels* analyzes the dominant mode of construction of reality in Northern Ireland by the British media—a process of censorship and self-censorship, of "balance" achieved by a careful selection that results in significant distortion to the end of reinforcement of the status quo.

In a sense *Acceptable Levels* is a film about the process of making a film about life in a working-class area, a device Godard and other film-makers have used but seldom with as much clarity. In that it is simultaneously a realist and a deconstructionalist text there is also a debt to early and late Rossellini. The film has a documentary source in that it is based on an actual event that was successfully hushed up (unlike the recent death of Sean Downes when police fired plastic bullets at a

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crowd assembled in front of the Sinn Fein office in Belfast). But it is also about the making of a hypothetical film about the event. Thus we view a film and a film-within-a-film.

The plot is rather straightforward. A British documentary television unit comes to the Divis Flats, off of the Falls Road in West Belfast, to make a film about the effects of violence on children in Northern Ireland. For the most part *Acceptable Levels* focuses upon the interactions of the film unit with the family and friends of a young girl—Roísin—who has been chosen to be the subject of the film. We soon learn that much of the commentary and an outline of the things that are to be filmed were written before the crew departed England. The script simply illustrates the insular preconceptions of the proposed title of the series: "Britain's Children: Ulster."

However, reality intervenes. While Roísin is being interviewed inside Divis Flats a young girl is killed outside—struck by a plastic bullet fired by a British army patrol. The only witnesses are people from the community. The remainder of *Acceptable Levels* is a rendition of the process by which the event is reported. Initially the documentary team attempt to film as much as possible, although they are clearly drawn to sensationalist scenes that can easily be shaped according to prevailing codes for reporting violence and civil unrest (scenes in which subjects lack a coherent voice). The people of Divis Flats, however, attempt to intervene to ensure their story gets told and interpreted correctly. For example, Mrs. Nolan, a neighbor, interposes herself between the camera and the corpse of the little girl, holds up a plastic bullet and challenges the crew to show it and tell the truth about what happened and why. Later Teresa, a young girl who witnessed the shooting, volunteers to be interviewed. Then Roísin, in an additional interview, voices her feelings about what happened.

As the film continues we witness the process through which all this disappears in the cutting room. The army and the controller of the program offer their advice. Concerns are voiced about the strength of the footage, the need to trim the program within the limits of broadcast time norms. Also the need to preserve "balance" in the way that events are reported and to avoid creating "sympathy for the terrorists," which can occur if negative aspects

ACCEPTABLE LEVELS

of British rule of Northern Ireland receive emphasis. Later other prejudices surface—one doesn't credit the evidence of "a hysterical woman and a child" against the claims of the military and the government.

Thus the interviews with Mrs. Nolan and Teresa are cut from the program. Mrs. Nolan's liquidation is especially chilling. First we watch the tape of her interview being run over several times on a TV monitor—just a small silent image, as the sound has been turned off, a not uncommon practice in film and television editing. Later the tape is replayed with sound but the noise of the editing machine and the conversation of the editor and the director virtually drown out her comments. The effect of all this is that we can see but cannot clearly hear Mrs. Nolan's accusations and her demand that they TV crew tell the truth about what happened. We, the audience, have to supply the indictment, initially from our own memory and then by amplifying Mrs. Nolan's protest. At this point, in a sense, as we begin to protest we construct a counter-documentary, one that is in accord with the reality of life in Northern Ireland.

We also witness the process by which Roísin's interview is edited so that she is portrayed as a symbolic victim—a survivor—not as an accusor, one aspect of the interview. Roísin's

judgment ("The soldiers did it") as well as Teresa's indictment ("It's natural that people should hit back") are cut. Of all the footage shot at Divis only Roísin's "I just try to keep out of trouble . . . I just try to get on with it" remain in the film. Thus the report is constructed so that by implication the Irish in Northern Ireland are rendered merely pathetic victims of an unalterable situation or else are marginalized. The acceptable level of film and broadcasting is that which defines anger and dissent and oppositional politics as extremism and deviance and the status quo in Northern Ireland as regrettably unchangeable.

—MICHAEL KLEIN

THE MYSTERIOUS CASTLE IN THE CARPATHIANS

Director: Oldřich Lipský. Producer: Jan Švankmajer. Screenplay: Jiří Brdečka, based on the novel by Jules Verne. Camera: Viktor Růžička. Distributor: International Film Exchange.

The works of Jules Verne have provided filmmakers with inspiration since the birth of the medium, and many dozens of versions of his stories have since been made around the world. One of the countries most interested in adapting Verne to the screen is Czechoslovakia. The most famous Czech effort to date has been Karel Zeman's *An Invention of Destruction* (1957—released in the United States under the title *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*), but Czechoslovaks have made numerous other Verne movies, the most recent of which is *The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians.*

Although Verne has always been highly regarded on the European continent, poor translations of his books in the English-speaking world long relegated him to the ranks of "children's" authors. However, in recent years scholars have begun to correct these errors, and have been increasingly intrigued upon realizing that Verne's technological prophecies were more than matched by his insight into the sociopolitical dislocations scientific progress would engender. The nature and adaptability of this vision have made him not only popular in the cinema of the West, but in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as well. But while Hollywood has usually either ignored Verne or added new undertones to its versions, and Russians have often imposed socialist themes, the Czechoslovaks have been able to avoid such extremes. Less willing to distort Verne, they seem to recognize that he can be simultaneously read on levels of both narrative and commentary, a balance their renderings emulate. Though not adhering slavishly to the original plot, they do remain faithful to his essential spirit and overriding concerns, producing movies that show both a familiarity and a compatability with his oeuvre. Another reason for the popularity of these pictures with Czech audiences may be because of the national penchant for comedy; Karel Zeman demonstrated in his films how Verne's own sense of humor, and the period setting of his tales, could be given a harmless tongue-in-cheek treatment that in no way diminished their underlying seriousness.

The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians is based on *Le Chateau des Carpathes,* in which Verne foresaw a type of motion picture. To use this idea in a movie the film-makers had to develop one of the most complex renderings of Verne ever produced for the cinema. The original book—which revealed the combined influences of Jacques Offenbach, E. T. A. Hoffman, Edgar Allan Poe and the gothic—was published in 1892, and has since been turned into Georges Aphergis's opera *Pandemonium,* as well as a French television production in 1976; Alberto Cavalcanti tried unsuccessfully to film the novel in Rumania in 1957. The new Czech version follows the structure which has become archetypal in Verne films: a man full of belief in the superiority of his era is lured into investigating curious phenomena, whereupon he is captured by a misanthropic, alienated outcast—of whom Captain Nemo was the prototype—and exposed to the scientist's superior technology. The captive, instead of learning from his experience, only seeks to destroy this vision of the future and those who can bring it about, escaping to a world momentarily restored to a tentative status quo.

Teleke, an opera star, is traveling through the woods of the Carpathian range when he encounters a forester, half-dead with fear from a strange vision. Frustrated by the superstitions of the nearby village, Teleke accepts the residents' challenge to explore the suppos-

judgment ("The soldiers did it") as well as Teresa's indictment ("It's natural that people should hit back") are cut. Of all the footage shot at Divis only Roísin's "I just try to keep out of trouble . . . I just try to get on with it" remain in the film. Thus the report is constructed so that by implication the Irish in Northern Ireland are rendered merely pathetic victims of an unalterable situation or else are marginalized. The acceptable level of film and broadcasting is that which defines anger and dissent and oppositional politics as extremism and deviance and the status quo in Northern Ireland as regrettably unchangeable.

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The works of Jules Verne have provided filmmakers with inspiration since the birth of the medium, and many dozens of versions of his stories have since been made around the world. One of the countries most interested in adapting Verne to the screen is Czechoslovakia. The most famous Czech effort to date has been Karel Zeman's *An Invention of Destruction* (1957—released in the United States under the title *The Fabulous World of Jules Verne*), but Czechoslovaks have made numerous other Verne movies, the most recent of which is *The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians.*

Although Verne has always been highly regarded on the European continent, poor translations of his books in the English-speaking world long relegated him to the ranks of "children's" authors. However, in recent years scholars have begun to correct these errors, and have been increasingly intrigued upon realizing that Verne's technological prophecies were more than matched by his insight into the sociopolitical dislocations scientific progress would engender. The nature and adaptability of this vision have made him not only popular in the cinema of the West, but in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union as well. But while Hollywood has usually either ignored Verne or added new undertones to its versions, and Russians have often imposed socialist themes, the Czechoslovaks have been able to avoid such extremes. Less willing to distort Verne, they seem to recognize that he can be simultaneously read on levels of both narrative and commentary, a balance their renderings emulate. Though not adhering slavishly to the original plot, they do remain faithful to his essential spirit and overriding concerns, producing movies that show both a familiarity and a compatability with his oeuvre. Another reason for the popularity of these pictures with Czech audiences may be because of the national penchant for comedy; Karel Zeman demonstrated in his films how Verne's own sense of humor, and the period setting of his tales, could be given a harmless tongue-in-cheek treatment that in no way diminished their underlying seriousness.

The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians is based on *Le Chateau des Carpathes,* in which Verne foresaw a type of motion picture. To use this idea in a movie the film-makers had to develop one of the most complex renderings of Verne ever produced for the cinema. The original book—which revealed the combined influences of Jacques Offenbach, E. T. A. Hoffman, Edgar Allan Poe and the gothic—was published in 1892, and has since been turned into Georges Aphergis's opera *Pandemonium,* as well as a French television production in 1976; Alberto Cavalcanti tried unsuccessfully to film the novel in Rumania in 1957. The new Czech version follows the structure which has become archetypal in Verne films: a man full of belief in the superiority of his era is lured into investigating curious phenomena, whereupon he is captured by a misanthropic, alienated outcast—of whom Captain Nemo was the prototype—and exposed to the scientist's superior technology. The captive, instead of learning from his experience, only seeks to destroy this vision of the future and those who can bring it about, escaping to a world momentarily restored to a tentative status quo.

Teleke, an opera star, is traveling through the woods of the Carpathian range when he encounters a forester, half-dead with fear from a strange vision. Frustrated by the superstitions of the nearby village, Teleke accepts the residents' challenge to explore the suppos-

THE MYSTERIOUS CASTLE IN THE CARPATHIANS

edly haunted Castle Gorz. A flashback explains that Teleke is mourning the recent death of his fellow performer, the renowned diva Salsa, which he blames on the overbearing attentions of Baron Gorz, who followed her relentlessly all over Europe. Exploring the castle, Teleke sees Salsa apparently alive and singing, and discovers that Gorz has returned to his ancestral home—but Teleke is captured by his enemy before he can attempt a rescue.

The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians places at least as much emphasis on comedy as any previous Verne movie (the scriptwriter and director specialize in parodies) placing the tale in a satirical light that verges on the slapstick. The Gothic narrative is treated in an irreverent manner and the characters—none of whom are likable or even faintly heroic—are portrayed as foolish combinations of quirky personalities and pompous delusions of grandeur. As in nearly all Verne films, the science-fiction receives emphasis, although the Czech humor prevents this element from becoming pompous. In the manner of Karel Zeman's earlier adaptations, much clever amusement is derived from the bizarre gadgets and inventions (designed here by artist Jan Svankmajer) of Gorz's mad scientist, Orfanik. These archaic and Victorian devices are carried almost to the point of absurdity, as done by George Méliès, yet manage to be fully compatible with, and never degrade, the Verne story.

However, it is primarily the world of opera, portrayed as pretentious, naturally elitist and even silly, which is the central target of the humor in *The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians.* The movie, set in the late nineteenth century, is enveloped in an antiquarian world, dominated by the classical music of which Gorz is a fanatical devotee. At Salsa's last recital, Orfanik photographed an audiovisual recording from a theater box, and following her death stole her corpse. This allowed Gorz to retreat to his castle and live wholly captivated by his memories, bringing Salsa back to life by playing Orfanik's motion picture in his private theater. It is these screenings, which first the forester and later Teleke observe and, uncomprehending, accept as reality.

In adapting *Le Chateau des Carpathes,* the film-makers wisely realized that a novel's prose description of a vision heard and seen is far different from actual perception in a movie. To translate this idea into the inherently illusionary medium of film would require the introduction of a self-reflexive dimension, so a bold and sophisticated adjustment was

made in the story. Whereas Verne's readers rarely have any doubt as to the veracity of Salsa's death, attributing Teleke's easy acceptance of her apparent resuscitation to the vain hope of a heartsick lover, the movie places its audience in a much more ambiguous position. The viewer is forced to share Teleke's experience along with him—unable to distinguish between the film we are watching and Gorz's motion picture within the film—gradually becoming ever more sure that Salsa is indeed alive, until a reunion of the lovers is fully expected. The uncertainty as to whether such a switch in the plot will occur is heightened by Teleke's sighting of Salsa inside a glass room —seemingly asleep and under the hypnotic spell of Gorz—and the impressionistic, tinted flashbacks of her death, contrasting with the extremely crisp, supra-lifelike vision of her singing in the castle. But just at the moment a rescue is expected, a miscarried experiment of Orfanik's damages the castle, shattering the windows of Salsa's glass room. In a scene as shocking and unexpected as any since *Psycho,* Teleke discovers that all that remains of her is dust, a wig, and an air compressor to give her dress the motion of breathing—Orfanik had merely preserved her lifelike corpse in an air-tight chamber for Gorz's gaze.

As Gorz, unfazed, prepares to watch his motion picture recording one more time, it becomes obvious why Salsa has only been seen in the castle from a static angle, repeating the same song: Gorz has been playing the same clip from her last performance over and over. But Orfanik revolts against his cruel mentor before Gorz's mad ecstasy can be resumed. In a comic romp of death staged in front of Salsa's remains, the scientist and Gorz kill each other, destroying the motion picture; the castle is detonated in a pseudo-atomic explosion. Teleke barely manages to escape, but the journal he has hopefully retrieved of Orfanik's experiments only finds its way to ignominy in a bureaucratic vault, becoming food for rats. Thus, underlying the film is a fundamentally bleak view of all aspects of life and society, corresponding to the pessimistic mood of Verne's later work.

The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians takes Verne beyond the realm of prophecy into a reflection of the nature of cinema and our tendency to accept whatever image is presented as reality. By the conclusion the audience has been jolted from its complacency, by the contradictory twists of the plot and the denial of the expected happy ending, to a greater awareness of the potential for manipulation in the medium. Not only have the movies been exposed as deceptive, but so has science, which is portrayed here as variously failed and self-destructive. Certainly the treatment of false appearances in opera and film is handled in a light-hearted, playful manner, but this should not preclude *The Mysterious Castle in the Carpathians* from our attention, for despite—even because of—the comic style, this is a highly self-conscious work demanding recognition on multiple levels.

—BRIAN TAVES

Orfanik and Gorz

THE TROUBLE WITH HANNA

Produced and directed by Costa-Gavras. Script: Franco Solinas, from an original screenplay by Solinas and Costa-Gavras. Photography: Ricardo Aronovich. Music: Gabriel Yared. Universal.

Traditionally, Hollywood's depiction of Arabs has taken the form of either fanatic, cold-blooded terrorists in films such as *Black Sunday* (1977) and *Raid on Entebbe* (1976) or exotic-sensual figures in films that include *The Sheik* (1921), *Kismet* (1944, remake 1955), *Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves* (1944) and *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962). Films with negative images, in which Arabs constitute "bad objects" within the narrative, provide easy targets for ideological analysis. But, as Robert Stam[1] has pointed out, films which present "positive images" are often intrinsically lim-

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ited by their conformity to liberal shibboleths. *Lawrence of Arabia,* for example, "orientalizes the orient," to borrow Edward Said's terminology, by constructing a romantic vision of "Arab otherness." Arabs are equated with the desert, and the only two urban sequences set in the Middle East concentrate on the British, as if the Arab world is merely a huge desert, much as Tarzan's Africa is merely a huge jungle. Topographical reductionism, among other distorted images, reflects the film's dynamic of positive portrayals whose facade of sympathy is simultaneously contrasted and counteracted by the cinematic style. Costa-Gavras's *Hanna K.* is the first Hollywood feature to deal with the Palestinian question from a sympathetic vantage point. But the film, despite its attempts to transcend its precursors, in some ways continues a negative tradition. It endeavors to negate dominant ideology concerning the Arab world, but basically still affirms Western modes of representing the Orient.

With the exception of his first feature, Costa-Gavras's work has always been noted for its passionate engagement with political controversy. Even in his earliest films, he was concerned with the disparity between "law" and justice, and attentive to the inherently repressive nature of many political systems. *Z* (1969), for example, emphasizes the restrictions on political liberty imposed by the junta in Costa-Gavras's native Greece during the mid-sixties. *Missing* (1982), similarly, explores violations of legal due process in a country that unmistakably evokes the reality of Pinochet's Chile. Yet, these controversies are always sugarcoated (and coded), and the generic gloss of the thriller or courtroom drama is always a prerequisite, fusing political sensationalism with the codes of commercial cinema. Although *Hanna K.* was hailed as a politically significant film because of its relatively compassionate treatment of the plight of the Palestinians (as well as predictably being denounced as anti-Israeli propaganda), it is "essentially unpolitical," to quote an official of the Israeli film division. This view was also echoed by American reviewers who constantly drew parallels with George Cukor's *Adam's Rib* (1949) and were understandably baffled by the film's oscillation between a saccharine romantic quadrangle and unfocused social commentary. It is difficult to believe that this murky film was scripted by the same man who wrote Pontecorvo's *Battle of Algiers* (1968), but the exigencies of international coproduction (with Universal Studios as a major participant) were probably responsible for the film's compromised, not to mention confusing, political and narrative orientation. Unfortunately, Costa-Gavras seems to have become, in the words of Pauline Kael, "the European Stanley Kramer." It is interesting to note that the film was produced with the full cooperation of the Israeli government and the same official remarked: "We got favorable publicity for being liberals. Had we made problems for Costa-Gavras, the left-wing press would have had a field day."[2] This statement, unwittingly, reflects the basically reformist nature of Costa-Gavras's work. The limitations of his approach, as a paradigm for politically engaged cinema, were illuminated by a series of debates conducted during the ferment of the post '68 period; Comolli and Narboni were particularly critical of films that strove for political significance but did not essentially challenge the ruling ideology, or its language and imagery.

In *Hanna K.,* the complexities of the Arab-Israeli conflict are superficially treated and undermined through stereotypical characterizations. Lacking a fully developed political consciousness, Hanna functions within a purely individualistic and humanistic framework, unlike her real-life counterparts: the famous Israeli women lawyers, Lea Tsemal and Felicia Langer. Similarly, the aggressive Israeli District Attorney, Joshua Herzog (played by the Irish actor Gabriel Byrne) represents a cliched vision of a *macho* sabra whose reactionary sentiments are meant to correspond to those of all Israelis. The specific nature of the Palestinians' political affiliations, on the other hand, are never explicitly spelled out. Isolated from any Arab social context, the principal Palestinian character, Selim Bakri, remains an enigma throughout the film. Although Arabs are present during the lengthy courtroom sequences, there is not even a hint of what personal or political affinities they might have in common. This structuring absence is somewhat reminiscent of films such as *Algiers* (1938) and *Casablanca* (1942) which virtually exclude the presence

of Arabs on their own soil. The predilection for foregrounding Western characters and preoccupations led *Hanna K.* to be disparagingly referred to as "An Unmarried Woman in Israel."

In several interviews, Costa-Gavras reiterated his intention to explore the Palestinian-Israeli conflict through a woman protagonist. In this sense Hanna Kaufman, played by Jill Clayburgh, becomes the key to unveiling the effects of the Israeli legal system upon Palestinians, and the relationship of this official apparatus to questions of justice. The film, however, is almost hopelessly marred by the fact that the central role was terribly miscast. It was truly preposterous to assign this part to an actress who would seem more at home in a family drama set in the Middle West than in a "semi-engaged, single, pregnant mother" drama set in the Middle East. Her waspish persona in films such as Mazursky's *An Unmarried Woman* (1978) and Pakula's *Starting Over* (1979) is transferred to this vastly different social and political context. This miscasting raises the ideological quandary of absolutely equating the American Jew with American hegemonic culture. In happy contrast to Clayburgh's unfamiliarity with the film's milieu, Muhamad Bakri's identification with his character, Selim Bakri, even took the form of having identicial surnames, a decision jointly arrived at by Costa-Gavras and Bakri himself. Paradoxically, Selim Bakri's function within the narrative is a subsidiary one, although his plight is the thematic focus of the film.

The films of Costa-Gavras that deal with third-world issues—*State of Siege* (1973), *Missing* and *Hanna K.*—are focalized through a first-world protagonist. This strategy, which filters all points of view through a single, dominant perspective, raises questions concerning what the Russian literary critic Boris Uspensky terms "the norms of the text." All ideological points of view, both Palestinian and Israeli, are integrated into Hanna's perspective. The ideology of the narrator-focalizer, as Uspensky remarks, is usually understood as authoritative and all other ideologies in the text are evaluated from this privileged position. Here Hanna's preoccupations, both romantic and legal, are incorporated into this privileged position, a contrivance that evokes the even more romanticized narrative structure of *Lawrence of Arabia.* David Lean's film emphasizes the charismatic personality of the English Lawrence whose vitality eclipses Arab political consciousness and who seems to single-handedly inspire the Arab struggle for independence. *Hanna K.,* with its sincere but superficial compassion, continues, therefore, the romantic subgenre of exotic travelogues, inevitably both ethnocentric and introspective.

The film, like other recent "Middle East thrillers" (*Circle of Deceit* and *The Little Drummer Girl*), constructs a dynamic in which a first-world protagonist invariably explains third-world oppression. This device is designed to make the film's didactic thrust palatable to a Western audience. In the courtroom sequences, for example, Hanna not only speaks for Selim but also is foregrounded within the shot, standing closer to the spectator. Dialogue and *mise-en-scène* become, therefore, essential components of her dominance within the narrative, perpetually orienting the spectator to Clayburgh's apolitical humanism. At the same time, the narrative structure allows the spectator to know only as much as Hanna knows. When Hanna follows Selim, for example, she is not cognizant (nor are the spectators) that he is planning to demonstrate to her the enormity of Palestinian suffering. The penultimate sequence in which Selim lures Hanna to an abandoned refugee camp is one more stage in the process of her ongoing education. The Western spectator's consciousness is deemed inseparable from Hanna's world view, a process at the core of the film's underlying assumptions. In effect, the film can be seen as a *Bildungsroman* which chronicles Hanna's journey from ignorance to a relative awareness of political and sexual inequalities.

Focalization is not the only device which enables *Hanna K.* to maintain a tone of rather schematic didacticism. The classical structure of repetition, characteristic of the *Bildungsroman,* corresponds to sporadic repetitions within the film. An understanding of the film's overall structure, as well as individual sequences, can be illuminated by the concept of narrative rhyming. The best example of this kind of rhyming sequence occurs when Hanna attempts to establish the facts concerning Selim's claim to his ancestral house. At the

very beginning of the sequence, a sign identifies Kfar Rimon, a recently constructed Israeli village. The end of the sequence provides an analogical contrast to Hanna's initial encounter with the cheerful residents of Kfar Rimon. An Arab shepherd, walking near the remnants of an Arab village, despairingly cries: "This is Kfur Rumaneh." The opposition of the new houses to the village's ruins, and the opposition of the written sign of the Hebrew Kfar Rimon to the oral pronouncement of the Arabic Kfur Rumaneh, outlines the contrast between present transparency and past invisibility. This contrast is further explored within the sequence itself, which partially takes place in Selim's former house. Hanna learns to connect these two polarities with a discovery of a family photograph that corresponds to the one Selim had given her. Concurrently, a group of tourists gawk at Selim's house, and their naivete is contrasted with Hanna's newly transformed consciousness. This contrast is reinforced through blatant visual irony, since the tour-guide scene juxtaposes a Koranic inscription on the gate of Selim's house with a subsequent shot of the tourists, one of whom wears a hat labelled "Welcome to Israel." The visual rhetoric of this segment reflects the antinomies of the secular and the sacred, commercialism and tradition, and permanence and transience. The inscription itself ("I shall adore not that which you adore—nor will you adore that which I adore") demystifies cliched western notions of Islamic fanaticism.

The similarities of key events and circumstances are also apparent in the film's opening and conclusion. Already in the opening sequences, Gabriel Yared's music, replete with Arabic leitmotifs, delineates the basic terms of the conflict that will later emerge. A static shot of an Arab woman and child seated beneath a typical oriental house is soon eclipsed by a pan following Israeli soldiers coming out of a doorway. Selim, suddenly, is forcibly removed from a well that has served as his hiding place. After a brief interrogation by Israeli soldiers, the owner's house is detonated. The reason for Selim's taking refuge in the well is never made completely apparent to the audience, and the question of his participation in political violence remains ambiguous, an ambiguity that continues throughout the very sequence that ends the film. The television

Fatal mismatch: Selim Bakri, Hanna K.

news broadcast that announces a terrorist bombing reinforces the relationship of Selim to the recent political turmoil. The film ends as it began, with his escape from Israeli authorities, and the last shot of armed soldiers echoes the opening. Whereas classical patterns of repetition yield narrative closure, *Hanna K.*, paradoxically, employs an open-ended pattern of repetition. (Despite this facade of modernism, the film utilizes classical shooting style and editing techniques.) Does this seem to imply that Selim's perpetual flight dooms him to being a "wandering Palestinian"?

Ironically, the "wandering Palestinian" is analogous to the traditional romantic myth of the "wandering Jew." As with many *Bildungs* stories, the protagonist's quest adheres to a pattern of repetition, either circular or spiral. Hanna's literal pilgrimage from the US to Israel evokes a kind of Wilhelmina Meisterin travelogue. Furthermore, the irony is doubled when one considers the fact that a straightforward political expose ends up resembling a secular grail story, accompanied by the archetypal tropes of redemption and moral edification. The Christian theodicy in its secular version is superimposed on a primarily Jewish and Muslim Israel. Costa-Gavras's attempt to criticize a discriminatory system is, paradoxically, mirrored in his own unconscious condescension, continuing the Western heritage of objectifying the Orient. The "academic and imaginative demonology of the 'mysterious Orient'"[3] permeates, for example, sexual relationships, typified by the romanticist tendency to structure the Orient as an exotic otherness. Selim is marginalized by Hanna in a manner not unlike the traditionally Western

male fetishization of Oriental women, reminiscent of Flaubert's insistent desire to omnisciently recount Salambo's thoughts and emotions. The Oriental, whether a man or a woman, remains an enigma, never completely satisfying the desire of the romanticist-author and reader/spectator to project his/her fantasies on an amorphous object. This contradiction is inextricable from the problems inherent to *Hanna K.* Costa-Gavras and Franco Solinas criticize Israeli policy by having Selim complain to Hanna: "They would not listen to me . . . they would not hear me." The filmmakers, however, fall prey to parallel modes of hierarchical representation. Thus, they will not listen to or hear Selim, either.

This type of hierarchical representation not only inflicts itself upon the images of Palestinians, but also distorts Israeli reality through Americanized characterizations and linguistic manipulation. The same incongruous logic implies that Jill Clayburgh is an Israeli, and coincides with the rationale that the English of Hollywood scripture masquerades as "Hebrew." This garbled lingua franca characterizes Hollywood's *fata morgana* versions of the Holy Land. *Hanna K.* is unsurprisingly true to Hollywood's linguistic cannibalism, substituting English for disparate national languages. As George Steiner observes: "Intentionally or not, American English and English, by virtue of their global diffusion, are a principal agent in the destruction of natural linguistic diversity."[4] *Hanna K.* assumes a cultural universe of discourse in which the syntax and morphology of English devours Hebrew, a linguistic colonialism that ironically extends to the US's staunchest ally, Israel. The brief snippets of Arabic, meanwhile, are subtitled, creating an unequal and artificial dichotomy. Furthermore, Costa-Gavras reveals his ignorance of the linguistic realities of Israel when he suggests that Hanna, the Israeli, blithely assumes that Selim, the film's archetypal Palestinian, does not speak Hebrew. The prevalent English dialogue, therefore, points not only to the compromised nature of this French-US coproduction, but also creates an ideological homogeneity in which Israel and the West become practically indivisible.

The film, consequently, reinforces the petrified assumption that Israel and the United States are as inseparable as David and Jonathan. An absolute identification of the two countries is reductionist in nature, and views Israel as a monolithic political entity without specific interests of its own. *Hanna K.* also ignores the schism between East and West that exists among Jews in Israel by Portraying Israel as an exclusively Western entity. Forming 65% of the Jewish population, Oriental Jews who immigrated to Israel mainly from Arab and Muslim countries have been denied access to political power by the Ashkenazi elite. Culturally linked to the Arab world, they also form a potential source of political transformation in the area. By almost completely excluding Oriental Jews from the narrative and *mise-en-scène,* Costa-Gavras continues hegemonic patterns of representing Israel. The only presence of Oriental Jews involves a brief appearance by Hanna's maid, a marginalization reminiscent of Hollywood's traditional depiction of black characters. Ironically, even more conservative Hollywood films such as *Alice Adams* (1935) and *Gone with the Wind* (1939) tended to devote more narrative time and dialogue to blacks than the "liberal" *Hanna K.* spends on equivalent figures.

The monolithic view is perpetuated on another level when positions of both the Likud and Labor parties are fused into the character of Professor Leventhal, an acquaintance of Hanna. His diatribe recapitulates mainstream Zionist ideology, and pithily invokes the dogma shared by Ben Gurionists as well as Beginists: ". . . Miss Kaufman prefers tragedy. What is your alternative? Give citizenship to anyone who asks for it? Make us live as a minority in a sea of Arabs? Cram us into a new ghetto? Your family (not a bad idea to remember) also had its share in the Holocuast. Now at least we have a country, an identity, and we must defend it." In other words, the Holocaust, the official memory of Israel, is displaced into a different context. Dismissing Palestinian rights is justified in the terms of European-Jewish victimization, while ignoring the vastly different experience of Jews in Arab countries. Leventhal introduces a false determinism that links European-Jewish misery with an inevitable dispossession of Palestinians, thus leading the "leftist" director to exclude truly progressive positions. At the same time, the film presents the Palestinian ideology only as it is constructed by Leventhal's speech, and

not through Selim, the ostensible focus of narrative attention. *Hanna K.,* ironically, provides a more succinct expression of the European-Zionist perspective than the vicissitudes of the Palestinian position it is supposedly advocating.

In a lengthy review of *Hanna K.,* Edward Said suggests that the film's "political message overrides its aesthetic problems." This artificial separation would seem to contradict Said's own subtle reflections on aesthetic questions in *Beginnings* and *The World, the Text and the Critic,* works that make explicit the relationship between textual analysis and ideological critique. Yet, in his own review he praises *Hanna K.* for its positive depiction of the anguished Palestinian. As we have already observed, however, the portrayal of the Palestinian forms part of a long tradition of representing the Orient, an issue discussed brilliantly in Said's *Orientalism.* The film's significance, then, cannot be attributed to the depiction of a "noble Palestinian." In fact, if compared to *Circle of Deceit* and *The Little Drummer Girl,* which merely use the Middle East as a backdrop, *Hanna K.* emerges as creditable in its effort to "allow us to witness the Palestinian quandary as a narratable human history."[5] *The Little Drummer Girl,* for example, blurs political distinctions by emphasizing the savagery of both Israelis and Palestinians. This view assumes the superiority of the West to the "little wars" of "irrational" nations. This cynical stance is at least not shared by *Hanna K.,* which along with films such as Tawfiq Saleh's *The Dupes* (1971) and Uri Barabash's *Beyond the Walls* (1984), attempts to disinter what has been hidden from history.

—RICHARD PORTON
AND ELLA SHOCHAT

NOTES

1. See "Colonialism, Racism and Representation," *Screen,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (March-April, 1983). Also "Slow Fade to Afro: The Black Presence in Brazilian Cinema," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. XXXVI, No. 2 (Winter 1982-3).

2. Joan Borstein, *Jerusalem Post,* Nov. 10-12, 1983, International Edition.

3. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

4. George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 470.

5. Edward Said, "Hanna K.: Palestine with a Human Face," *Village Voice,* October 11, 1983.

LIQUID SKY

Produced and directed by Slava Tsukerman. Screenplay by Tsukerman, Anne Carlisle and Nina V. Kerova. Photography: Yuri Neyman. Editor: Sharyn Leslie Ross. Music: Tsukerman, Brenda I. Hutchinson, and Clive Smith. Cinevista, Inc.

The first narrative film of Russian émigré Slava Tsukerman, *Liquid Sky,* is at heart a love story, albeit an unusual one. The central character Margaret (Anne Carlisle) eventually comes to love the space creature whose search for food—first heroin then opiate-like chemicals released in the brain during orgasm—has led it to her roof. The significance of Margaret's love is that it rescues her from a world of debased human relationships and finally transfigures her own being. Margaret is a member of the New Wave subculture as it exists in New York City. On the surface, she moves in a world of frenzied hair styles, bizarrely painted faces, and eccentric costuming. But, inwardly, she lives in a world where nourishment has been reduced to food, love to sex, and self-transcendence to heroin-induced highs. Yet Tsukerman handles his main character and her rather sordid world so that they present a vision of human possibility, a vision he sustains with exceptional cinematic style.

Tsukerman's vision is more convincing in our cynical age, perhaps, because it presents an existence shorn of ready possibilities. When we meet her, Margaret is already disaffected with her suburban Connecticut upbringing, and she is now experiencing a deeper alienation in the New Wave culture she has escaped to. Sexually, she is assaulted by those she hates: a Quaalude-dispensing creep and a heroin addict. She is forced in varying degrees by those she loves or likes: her professor and former lover, her lesbian partner and roommate, her fellow fashion model and male look-alike, Jimmy. As a model, Margaret out-Herods the extremest fashion looks of *Vogue,* and in a brilliant montage of stills Tsukerman treats us to a peacock display of New Wave fashions. But the drug-laden photography session of *Midnight Magazine* descends into a sadomasochistic sexual taunting of Jimmy and Margaret with the magazine personnel ringed round full of voyeuristic expectancy. So neither traditional society nor the New Wave underground, neither sexual engagement nor professional attainment offer Margaret sustenance. She finds

not through Selim, the ostensible focus of narrative attention. *Hanna K.,* ironically, provides a more succinct expression of the European-Zionist perspective than the vicissitudes of the Palestinian position it is supposedly advocating.

In a lengthy review of *Hanna K.,* Edward Said suggests that the film's "political message overrides its aesthetic problems." This artificial separation would seem to contradict Said's own subtle reflections on aesthetic questions in *Beginnings* and *The World, the Text and the Critic,* works that make explicit the relationship between textual analysis and ideological critique. Yet, in his own review he praises *Hanna K.* for its positive depiction of the anguished Palestinian. As we have already observed, however, the portrayal of the Palestinian forms part of a long tradition of representing the Orient, an issue discussed brilliantly in Said's *Orientalism.* The film's significance, then, cannot be attributed to the depiction of a "noble Palestinian." In fact, if compared to *Circle of Deceit* and *The Little Drummer Girl,* which merely use the Middle East as a backdrop, *Hanna K.* emerges as creditable in its effort to "allow us to witness the Palestinian quandary as a narratable human history."[5] *The Little Drummer Girl,* for example, blurs political distinctions by emphasizing the savagery of both Israelis and Palestinians. This view assumes the superiority of the West to the "little wars" of "irrational" nations. This cynical stance is at least not shared by *Hanna K.,* which along with films such as Tawfiq Saleh's *The Dupes* (1971) and Uri Barabash's *Beyond the Walls* (1984), attempts to disinter what has been hidden from history.

—RICHARD PORTON
AND ELLA SHOCHAT

NOTES

1. See "Colonialism, Racism and Representation," *Screen,* Vol. 24, No. 2 (March-April, 1983). Also "Slow Fade to Afro: The Black Presence in Brazilian Cinema," *Film Quarterly,* Vol. XXXVI, No. 2 (Winter 1982-3).

2. Joan Borstein, *Jerusalem Post,* Nov. 10-12, 1983, International Edition.

3. Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (New York: Random House, 1978).

4. George Steiner, *After Babel* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), p. 470.

5. Edward Said, "Hanna K.: Palestine with a Human Face," *Village Voice,* October 11, 1983.

LIQUID SKY

Produced and directed by Slava Tsukerman. Screenplay by Tsukerman, Anne Carlisle and Nina V. Kerova. Photography: Yuri Neyman. Editor: Sharyn Leslie Ross. Music: Tsukerman, Brenda I. Hutchinson, and Clive Smith. Cinevista, Inc.

The first narrative film of Russian émigré Slava Tsukerman, *Liquid Sky,* is at heart a love story, albeit an unusual one. The central character Margaret (Anne Carlisle) eventually comes to love the space creature whose search for food—first heroin then opiate-like chemicals released in the brain during orgasm—has led it to her roof. The significance of Margaret's love is that it rescues her from a world of debased human relationships and finally transfigures her own being. Margaret is a member of the New Wave subculture as it exists in New York City. On the surface, she moves in a world of frenzied hair styles, bizarrely painted faces, and eccentric costuming. But, inwardly, she lives in a world where nourishment has been reduced to food, love to sex, and self-transcendence to heroin-induced highs. Yet Tsukerman handles his main character and her rather sordid world so that they present a vision of human possibility, a vision he sustains with exceptional cinematic style.

Tsukerman's vision is more convincing in our cynical age, perhaps, because it presents an existence shorn of ready possibilities. When we meet her, Margaret is already disaffected with her suburban Connecticut upbringing, and she is now experiencing a deeper alienation in the New Wave culture she has escaped to. Sexually, she is assaulted by those she hates: a Quaalude-dispensing creep and a heroin addict. She is forced in varying degrees by those she loves or likes: her professor and former lover, her lesbian partner and roommate, her fellow fashion model and male look-alike, Jimmy. As a model, Margaret out-Herods the extremest fashion looks of *Vogue,* and in a brilliant montage of stills Tsukerman treats us to a peacock display of New Wave fashions. But the drug-laden photography session of *Midnight Magazine* descends into a sadomasochistic sexual taunting of Jimmy and Margaret with the magazine personnel ringed round full of voyeuristic expectancy. So neither traditional society nor the New Wave underground, neither sexual engagement nor professional attainment offer Margaret sustenance. She finds

herself profoundly lost, deeply alienated as life's broad avenues turn into dead ends.

As a Russian émigré, Tsukerman has, no doubt, a special feel for what it is to experience alienation or to be an alien. While Tsukerman develops the serious side of alienation through Margaret, he wittily develops the lighter side through the character of a German scientist—an alien national—and ultimately through the other aliens—the beings from outer space. In creating this comic counterpoint, Tsukerman complicates and enriches the tone of his film. *Liquid Sky* is both serious and playful, dramatically earnest and satirically tongue-in-cheek.

Tsukerman suggests the response of the self to alienation in a provocative but elliptical treatment of perception. Mirrors appear constantly—the mirrors Margaret makes up in, the mirror on the roof balcony. While not mirrors strictly speaking, many other surfaces reflect light, such as the foil blanket used to cover a corpse or the metal sculpture by the balcony door. Likewise, the characters are often searching for or formally viewing one another. The German scientist repeatedly views the space creature through his telescope, thus placing Margaret's apartment under constant surveillance à la Hitchcock's *Rear Window.* The alien creature is itself imaged as something resembling an eyeball. Also, we are granted a vision of what the alien sees through a colorful kaleidoscope of computerized images. Finally, the heroin in Margaret's apartment is hidden behind a ceramic face mask. In overall effect, the "looking" suggests, perhaps, the self's search for meaningful communion with others while the mirrors and mask suggest the self's search for its own identity and worth.

In this search, our perceptions are usually guided by commonly accepted social and personal codes. But in *Liquid Sky,* the characters have abandoned traditional codes of behavior and must define themselves in new ways: through sex, drugs, New Wave music and dance. But their most powerful means of asserting a unique identity is through their clothing. Costume becomes a theater of the self. Indeed, Margaret and her former professor-lover articulate the point. The professor laments the passing of Margaret's student dress—jeans and turtleneck—and criticizes her present "whorish" attire. She replies that he confused his jeans and turtleneck with his rebellion, thinking they stood for love, freedom, and social justice. Unlike him, she knows that she is wearing a costume. But Margaret's insight deprives her of one more avenue of meaning. Her costumes may assert her difference, but they do not contain the depth of social purpose the jeans and turtleneck did. For his part, Tsukerman takes full advantage of the characters' costumes to create a lush display of light, color, and fabric —a visual *tour de force,* really, extended by the handling of the setting and realized through Yuri Neyman's dazzling cinematography. So whatever we may think of the characters, Tsukerman presents them with undeniable visual power.

In both key scenes and overall structure, the film focuses the problem of identity on Margaret. One such scene is the rare moment of rest after the fashion photography session. The assembled models and crew name their hometowns, as in World War II films where the collective solidarity of the nation is suggested by soldiers naming diverse cities and small towns across the USA. In *Liquid Sky,* the first town is significantly (for the Russian émigrés) Moscow (Idaho, I think). The last is Philadelphia, again significantly the city of brotherly love. ("From Russia with Love" in a way.) As the scene evolves, Margaret becomes the symbolic embodiment of the larger nation evoked by the catalogue of towns and cities, for as one character states, she is the "new Miss America."

If this title suggests a social identity for Margaret, it is an ironic one, for her actions and conception of herself throughout the film negate all the normal middle-class values a Miss America supposedly represents. Later, in perhaps the film's most arresting scene, Margaret paints her face under black light and then adds accent stripes of red, yellow, and blue. At the same time, she speaks a monologue of utter disillusionment with the Connecticut suburban life of girl meets lawyer-prince, marries, has weekend barbecues for neighboring princes and princesses, and is bored as they say, "delicious, delicious." The disillusionment is total because the Bohemian-artistic alternatives are even more bleak—life as an aging model-actress waiting for the

break that never comes, with lesbian lovers rather than men walking on her bones. Margaret's plight is not just that the social mores are unacceptable but that, bereft of values, she is cast into a deepening inner crisis.

Nowhere is the problem of identity clearer than in the realm of sexual behavior. In her monologue, Margaret declares that she has rendered herself as androgynous as David Bowie. Earlier, she has raised the defiant question of why genitals should in any way govern who she chooses to love. So Margaret lives with a lesbian lover. Even more, the film plays with sexual identity by casting Anne Carlisle as both the female Margaret and the male Jimmy—and at one point having them make love of sorts to one another. In *Liquid Sky,* even biology and gender have lost their power to confer clear identity, let alone worth.

But amidst the problems of identity, love sends out its siren song of perennial, if dangerous, promise—the promise at once to affirm the worth of our being and to enable us to transcend the selfish confines of that being. *Liquid Sky* works out both the danger and the promise. In a series of parallel scenes, we see Margaret beset in turn by the Quaalude creep, by her professor, by heroin addict Paul, by fashion model Jimmy, and by lesbian lover Adrian. In contrast, the space creature finally embraces Margaret. The film thus moves from rape to marriage.

The structure may be viewed as one of thesis, antithesis, synthesis—a Marxist-Hegelian arrangement any Russian, even an émigré, can take a certain cultural pride in. The thesis: Margaret's lovers abuse her. Apart from the rape, Adrian and Jimmy both fight her physically. They and the professor all violate her will, too, by asserting their role as lover against her wishes. The antithesis: Margaret avenges herself. The professor, Jimmy, Adrian, and—in an act of premeditated vengeance—the Quaalude creep all die, zapped by the space alien in its quest for opiates released in the brain during orgasm. The synthesis: Margaret and the space alien come to love one another during the course of their symbiosis. In a visually striking climax, Margaret dons a wedding dress and climbs a fire escape to join the space creature—a joining shown in extreme fast motion during which Margaret flails about like a rag doll, a flailing suggestive of orgasmic consummation. So the film progresses dialectically from sexual victimization through sexual retribution to sexual union.

In the last scene, Tsukerman resolves the issues of alienation and identity in the most fundamental way. In her union with the space creature, Margaret bridges the gulf between herself as a human being and an alien creature, a gulf that proves, ironically, less deep than that between Margaret and her fellow human beings. Margaret's earlier joyful exclamation, "Was that for me, Chief?" is her recognition that someone has treated her with kindness rather than selfishly exploited her. The creature does her the favor of vaporizing the embarrassing bodies in her apartment. This is a comic scene in the black humor vein of *Eating Raoul.* Moreover, in calling the creature "Chief" and "Indian," Margaret evokes the historical dimensions of alienation, for these terms remind us, however briefly, of the White Man's treatment of the Red Man. Margaret's sympathies are, of course, with her alien, her "Indian."

The film shows Margaret's union with the alien as an apotheosis, and this apotheosis endows the film's title with a new meaning. We have previously been informed that "liquid sky" is a poetic metaphor for heroin. But in the final scene, "liquid sky" becomes the beautiful metaphor for love's ecstasy. Margaret's love for the space creature symbolizes our human capacity to overleap that which would wall us in ourselves and make us aliens in our own world. "Liquid sky" is the expressive image for our flooding emotions when we make that leap.

Love transforms. Margaret, who has rejected heroin and its addicts forcefully throughout the film, ends by shooting herself full of heroin and begging the alien to "feed on me," heroin being the alien's food. (This is the culmination of a very witty set of food images: intercut restaurant scenes, Margaret's preparation of a chicken, a hilarious Chinese shrimp dinner, the foodlike preparation of heroin itself, and the space ship's resemblance to a "dinner plate.") The food imagery is appropriate, for Margaret wishes to nourish her beloved. Her sacrificial love transvalues the heroin.

In the broader context of the film, heroin and the use of drugs in general assume a larger

significance. They represent the profound human need for release from the alienation of life into an ecstatic state. The constant sexual questing of the film expresses an equally profound need for affirmation of the self in loving communion with others. As the film makes clear, without love, the ecstasy fails. The drugs merely debilitate; the sex is only someone walking on your bones. With deep insight, the film links, through the conception of the space creature, the sexual questing and the taking—both are human opiates. Yet if love be present, the opiate is not that of destructive escape but of transforming embrace. As the final scene suggests when Margaret is transfigured in a beam of white light, love creates the ecstasy; love leads into the liquid sky.

Much of the film's meaning and power exist because Tsukerman and Neyman realize the story in a cinematography of loving brilliance and transforming vision. The skies and skyscrapers of New York, indeed the whole cityscape, are photographed in rapturous colors: gorgeous lavenders, purples, golds, and oranges. As one character exclaims, enthralled by a rooftop view, "What a city!" Her loving embrace of the city is obvious in the music of her voice. The character puts into words the film's own loving visual embrace of its people, their dazzling costumes, and the New York setting. So it is ultimately not satire of a troubled culture but love of it, in spite of its flaws, that directs the eyes of these Russian émigrés. And "liquid sky" is their metaphor, too, for the transforming passion of that love.

So on the very terrain of life's bitterness, the film pitches love's mansion and envisions an ascent to glory from out of the depths. But if for many Tsukerman's answer remains outweighed by the problem, perhaps this is intended, just as with most philosophers the questions are ultimately more enduring than their answers. What is beyond much dispute, though, is that Tsukerman is an extremely talented filmmaker. *Liquid Sky* has the force, I believe, of Godard's *Breathless,* and while I would not expect Tsukerman to develop along the lines Godard has, he demonstrates an ability to create films independently that are of unusual merit. If he can retain his Russian émigré eye and its artistic integrity, he promises to stand with the likes of Pal Gabor, Istvan Szabo, and Andrzej Wajda, who collectively produce an Eastern European cinema the equal of any in the world.

—JOHN M. GOURLIE

CABARET's INHERITORS
Two New Films From Germany

Now that the New German Cinema is paunchy and middle-aged, there emerge among its inheritors directors like Wolf Gremm and Maximilian Schell, who would be making films anyway—with or without the movement. The dredging of Germany's Nazi past reaches new depths (psychological) in Schell's *Geschichten aus dem Wienerwald (Tales from the Vienna Woods)* and Wolf Gremm's *Fabian,* each modeled after another artist's work circa 1930, each a model of the prewar nostalgia spawned in *Cabaret.* One meaning of the word nostalgia is literally "homesickness," but the symptoms indicate that what ails the Germans has less to do with a lost thirties Heimat than with a chronic fear of its return. At least, that is the motive usually expressed when directors justify films about the effects or the origins of Third Reich. For some reason, the cabaret remains either a symbol or a microcosm of what was wrong with that Germany; thus, every film harking back to that extraordinary past must include a cabaret sequence with a tableau including a bevy of bare-breasted blondes. As of now, Maximilian Schell has made the only film where such nudity is not gratuitous. Schell's heroine is driven to exhibit herself to survive; Gremm's hero enjoys the exhibitionism of Berlin's exotica and lives off it.

Geschichten aus dem Wiener Wald is about the stripping of innocence, as a young girl is seduced and abandoned, reduced to displaying herself in a cabaret—a tale of honor lost in a manner reminiscent of Austria herself in the years before the Anschluss. Its source, the play that Ödön von Horváth wrote about 1930, has the poetic and political tendencies of *Threepenny Opera,* dealing with cosmic issues in street slang, while avoiding any tedious political didacticism. The milieu is the impoverished respectability of Vienna's small

significance. They represent the profound human need for release from the alienation of life into an ecstatic state. The constant sexual questing of the film expresses an equally profound need for affirmation of the self in loving communion with others. As the film makes clear, without love, the ecstasy fails. The drugs merely debilitate; the sex is only someone walking on your bones. With deep insight, the film links, through the conception of the space creature, the sexual questing and the taking—both are human opiates. Yet if love be present, the opiate is not that of destructive escape but of transforming embrace. As the final scene suggests when Margaret is transfigured in a beam of white light, love creates the ecstasy; love leads into the liquid sky.

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shopkeepers, whose aim is to adjust and readjust, if necessary, to the humiliations they inflict upon each other. What Brecht did for Berlin, Horváth did for Vienna, adapting the conventions of melodrama to a poetic naturalism whose shabbiness is made interesting by turning our expectations inside-out.

At the risk of extending this introduction, I would like to offer another view of the despair and cynicism of 1930 before looking at the diminished eighties versions of life as a cabaret. In those years, as Stephen Spender once noted in a certain Berlin cafe, "there isn't a single woman in here without the scars of a suicide attempt on her wrists." Where does one find the motivation for such ubiquitous self-destruction? If Maximilian Schell has understood it correctly, it lies in stupidity, or so he indicates in the inscription to *Wienerwald*'s pressbook: "Nothing imparts the feeling of infinity so much as stupidity." Thus Horváth. But Schell portrays these characters as frolicking, fumbling and stumbling less out of stupidity than out of an inability to understand their atrophied destinies.

Thus Marianne is a bit dumb in thinking her future could ever be bound up with Alfred's; Alfred even more so in expecting anything at all of the future; and the rest of the neighborhood for its make-shift attempts to save Marianne. She is the sweet young thing whose life is shattered by the happy ending. Her father has promised her to the hulk next door, Oskar the butcher, an unlikely match for a girl still playing hop-scotch when she's not minding the toy store, where in the window a skeleton hangs—an ill omen hanging between Marianne and Alfred at first sight. The Jewish neighborhood tobacconist is Alfred's "sugar-mama," who brings him to the picnic where Marianne is to become engaged to Oskar. In a happy-go-lucky sequence of eating, singing, drinking and bathing along the beautiful gray Danube, Schell provides foil for the lack of romance in the subsequent cabaret scenes. The gaiety of the Viennese working class may have its limitations, but it also has its honor, and when Alfred makes a play for Marianne on the shores of the flowing river with fireworks bursting in the background, he is cornered by her declaration of passion before the assembled and shocked party. According to the rules of the game, flirtation should not have such disastrous consequences as to deny Oskar his bride on the day of his engagement, but Marianne is not one to know rules or to play games.

If love vanquishes all, one expects love to hit lovers the hardest, but this story falls short of tragedy because Alfred is a ne'er-do-well of the lowest order. He and Marianne produce a child whom he entrusts to his wizened grandmother living in a ruin atop the Wachau hill. Like a child-sacrifice to heathen gods, the baby coughs to death after the old woman exposes him in a snow storm—a silently dreadful scene. Intermittently she plays "Tales from the Vienna Woods" on her zither with a sound as grating as the melodrama itself.

Meanwhile, back in town, Alfred has fobbed Marianne off on a bankrupt baroness who trains destitute girls to sing for their supper. The scene of Marianne's inept audition is at once pitiful and ridiculous, as she croaks a somewhat lewd song about happy maidens on the river. The effect of this scene is a clever bit of work, for when the camera zeros in on Birgit Doll's hopeless expression—and she is a welcome nontheatrical newcomer to the German cinema—we are overwhelmed by her humiliation and disappointment; when the camera pulls back for a long shot of her rather dumpy figure amidst this shabby aristocracy, her plight seems ludicrous. And this paves the way for the cabaret scene with its requisite "conferencier" (no one has yet matched Joel Gray) and mandatory topless tableau. Schell's daring extends only to allow the dancers to be realistically beefy, one of them obese to the point of fetishism (on loan from Fellini?).

It is this cabaret scene which reunites their destinies, as Marianne's father and his cronies recognize Marianne veiled only in diaphanous light. Aware of the scandal she has caused, Marianne attempts to explain to her sodden father why it has come to this, but he disowns her, leaving her in the clutches of a German-American cliché: a fat businessman come home to buy his own country. She prefers to pinch a few dollars from his wallet but is caught, to the horror of the baroness and her patrons.

We next see Marianne emerging from jail and contemplating suicide on a station platform, but instead she returns home—something only slightly less than suicidal. After the

neighbors—the tobacconist, butcher, and Marianne's pimp-of-a-husband—negotiate for the repatriation of Marianne, she turns the corner looking for her former life. Her father sits disconsolate and unsociable in his toy shop, providing some of the best, if most self-consciously artsy, scenes in the film. The specter of an old man among the dusty toys evokes images of an older but probably wiser Europe having lost interest in its past, or with the proper poetic paradox, of a past bitter and neglected by a present equally bitter and neglected, in retrospect. To underline the metaphoric weight of the toy shop, two scenes of a customer entering the shop to purchase toy soldiers frame Marianne's fall. When the old man refuses to order several dozen of each kind, because "it's too much trouble," the woman asks what ever happened to that nice young girl. The camera zeros in on his obese intransigence.

As his attitude approaches that of the old grandmother, both of them willing to destroy a younger generation with its more flexible, if questionable, morality, one sees the "generation gap" as a sign of a culture in the throes of self-destruction. The lack of respect for youth and the future, as Marianne embodies it, is projected further onto her child who is virtually murdered by its great-grandmother, and shared by types like Alfred, Erich, and their unemployed, billiards-playing, *sauve qui peut* companions. The child's actual death is shown in a scene where Alfred's grandmother writes a vicious letter full of innuendo to inform Marianne that God may take pity on her little bastard. Meantime, Marianne has been restored as the prodigal daughter, and the entire family converges on the hill, anxious to see the baby who will be the centrifugal reuniting force. Their disappointment is reflected in quick cutting back and forth from horrified recognition to angry, hopeless faces, as the group collapses again into fragmented individuals deprived of the child, their future and any common cause.

As could be expected, Schell handles actors with consummate skill, allowing them to up stage each other a bit in the comic scenes and, in the more serious scenes, avoiding long shots that would reveal a theatrical gesture or a histrionic indulgence (a consistent problem in German films). His use of the close-up is very self-conscious, explained as a teleological necessity: in order to let the characters emerge from Horváth's play, Schell began with long shots of Vienna's parks, streets, bridges, and sky to establish their environment—in other words, how "the Vienna Woods" actually appear. Then as Fate cornered these people, moving in closer and closer on them, Schell turned to the close-up, depending more and more on the actors to express what the grey stone in the landscape had done to them. Thus he could avoid any visual cause-and-effect shots surrounding swastikas and black shirts. The only political reference is in a subplot about the neighbor Valerie, who has a taste for younger men. Alfred's successor to her heart and pocket-book is Erich, a student with Nazi sympathies, who fulfills our expectations of seeing at least a bit of the hubba-hubba of that nascent radical right.

One roots among the artistic remnants of the prewar German-speaking world for the sensibility that led to a popular mandate for Hitler. Horváth's play reflects his cynicism as a man who had wandered all over Europe since childhood, who "was in love with the uncanny," according to Klaus Mann, who testifies to Horváth's sense of the sinister. Maximilian Schell casts the tale under grey skies, amid ruins, permitting weird specters to flitter through the gaiety of a beer garden, where a black-shrouded group in mourning weep in their beer. The adaptation from theater to film requires certain compensation: in order to tone down the theatrical elevation of the language, Schell adapts the light "to yield the necessary distance from Naturalism." And by filming the characters within their immediate surroundings, his long shots show just enough interaction between environment and people to allow us to infer from the personal tragedy of Marianne an entire social and political debacle. For example, upon finding out that her baby is dead, Marianne collapses—"I can't take it anymore"—and the butcher sweeps her into his arms and carries her down the hill to be his bride. One chokes on the happy ending, as one should at the thought of how the German nation, defeated in 1930 when the play premiered in Berlin, had been "saved" by the time Horváth died—in 1938, some weeks after the Anschluss.

Tales from the Vienna Woods is not as

daring a film as Horváth's play was a piece of theater. In half a century, the innovations of Brecht, Horvath, Piscator, *et al.,* have become commonplace, but their expression of alienation and paradox, of artistic conventions turned ironically on their heads, is no less out of place in our time than it was in their own. Their critics railed against them; Schell's critics mildly disapprove of the obviousness of his message and his "borrowings." The opening scene is a conversation with Death on a painted stage à la Ophuls. He frankly moves from an outdoor painted background to a genuine Viennese "Freudlosegasse" (Street Without Joy), which only looks like a set, because it's too clean and because its denizens tend to declaim on their stoops. It seems natural and even safe to film a play one has already turned into a London hit. But as every cineaste knows, theater and film are genres too often confused, and as every German cineaste knows, filmed theater is the bane of the German screen. Schell took a calculated risk, and with the advantageous necessity of starting anew in a different language, another country, and with a new cast, he has adapted *Tales* into a most poetic, "European" film, with its moody lighting, its slightly exaggerated and slower-than-necessary transitions, its patent symbolism, and thinking man's dialogue. Schell (cum Horváth) attempts to bring us beyond that level of melodrama indicated in the schmalz of the title. It is an invitation to a waltz of resignation.

If the decadence of the thirties represents a devaluation of the human spirit and moral bankruptcy, the current nostalgia should prompt us to look beyond the sensational opportunities it offers into the mirror image it offers of our own compromised existence. Erich Kaestner's novel *Fabian* portrays the failure of spirit in his own time as well as Wolf Gremm reflects our own failing spirit. Nostalgia leads one to seek a time and clime friendly to one's own *Weltanschauung* and Wolf Gremm has found his in Kaestner's Berlin of 1930. Although Gremm claims to identify with the main character, Dr. Jakob Fabian, he seems to be caught rather in the paradox that led Kaestner himself to add a secondary title to *Fabian,* namely "The Story of a Moralist."

The paradox is that of a moralist continually caught in immoral situations, be they personal, sexual, political or professional. The hero has an academic "Dr." before his name, but he has come to Berlin in search of work as a journalist or writer, only to be reduced to writing advertising blurbs. He is romantic enough to fall in love with a girl he picks up, because she proves to be—literally!—the girl next door in his rooming house. Several satisfactorily blunt sex scenes leave little to the imagination (remaining true to the novel), but they inevitably demand comparison to *Cabaret's* seminal Berlin lovestory. However, Gremm's direction puts sex at the center, right where it belongs, in such an affair in such a city in such an era, and the young bodies frankly playing at sex provide a stark contrast to scenes of other women's exhibitionism, hustling, and prostitution. There is the lawyer, who is willing to pay any price to anybody who will screw his nymphomaniac wife: a steamy bathtub scene. There's the lesbian sculptress who introduces Fabian and his friend Labude to a masochistic model. Another slinky white-satin woman grabs it where she can get it: a brief bounce on a short couch. A suicidal type lounges in the balcony of a cabaret, waiting for a man or death, whichever comes first.

When Fabian's girlfriend abandons her ambition to be a lawyer, as well as Fabian, for film and a film producer, she explains that her sugar-daddy is "older and more interesting" than Fabian. This could very well be true, for what makes Fabian's crowd uninteresting is their ability to drift, waiting for sensations to hit them and allowing destiny to choose them, instead of focusing their ambitions and energies enough to develop character instead of status. As evidence for this, a suicide episode betrays the academic (sic) level of Fabian's existential dilemma. They play a practical joke on Labude, informing him that his Ph.D. thesis had not been accepted. Fabian then finds best friend Labude sitting in a rocking chair as dapper as ever but with a bullet through his head. And although it surely wasn't worth dying for, neither was it worth living for. Which leads one to ask, "Was Berlin worth living for?"

Berlin, as Brecht and Kaestner knew it, was an ephemeral phenomenon which no

one could defend against its destiny as capital of the Third Reich. Wolf Gremm shows why. And if he has omitted the passages of self-justification and political relevance found in long conversations in the novel, it was in order to avoid what is obviously prophetic and profound in retrospect. "I wanted to make a film about that period, about which so much has been said and read, as if I didn't know what followed." Therefore, he shunned the swastikas which are today in danger of becoming kitsch in the cinema about fascism. The epiphenomenal effects of fascism are perhaps the indifference and irresponsibility it breeds in characters as resigned as Fabian, whose lives read like shaggy-dog stories. At the end, Fabian once more attempts a task he's incapable of doing: when a drowning boy cries for help, he leaps into the river. Alas, he can't swim, the text tells us, as the ever-widening concentric circles smooth out into the general flow of the river. Fabian has vanished without a trace.

Thus, the film avoids any distinct political message. "It is said," remarks Gremm, "that a new fascism is already at our door. I try to test these prognoses, even though I don't believe them. I do, however, sense the symptoms that existed in the time Fabian was on the make." To emphasize this lack of commentary, he has chosen Hans-Peter Hallwachs to play Fabian with his somewhat troubled mien, brutalized by Berlin's exoticism. His funereal expression seems appropriate to the down-beat destiny he represents, but it is difficult to believe in him lusting for life.

Berlin of the thirties is hot property right now; sex and Nazis are eternal hot properties. The combination in *Fabian* could run the risk of critics not taking the film seriously. One Berlin critic mocked the combination of love of life and love of flesh by nailing his critique on a scene where Fabian tells a colleague asking about his vocation, "I have an avocation: I live." Critic Stephen Locke deduced from the film that Fabian's true profession was that of a "humpmobile" (best possible translation of Mr. Locke's German). At face value, this may be true, although it elicited an acid response from the Berlin producer of the film. "The pot was boiling," says Gremm, "and that's what everybody at that time felt." The material in *Fabian* has clearly proven to be as controversial today in a film as it was when Kaestner first published it. And it is surely Kaestner's ability to write explicitly of Berlin's degeneracy that inspired Gremm's degenerate-looking film. What prompts a critic to pay more attention to this film than the several other cabaret-oriented films is not the identifiable "Berlin" stage in the Munich studio (which has been used since *Schlangenei*), but rather Gremm's portrayal of Berlin as a ship of fools, where the superfluous man is always bound to jump overboard—and sink.

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Books

ITALIAN CINEMA
From Neorealism to the Present

By Peter Bondanella. New York: Ungar, 1983. $10.95, paper.

The only real predecessors of Bondanella's general history in English are Roy Armes's *Patterns of Realism* (1971) and the translation of Pierre Leprohon's 1966 history, *The Italian Cinema*. So at the very least we must be grateful to Bondanella for updating our knowledge of Italian cinema by twelve years or so. In a little over 400 pages, Bondanella manages to present a considerable amount of information about films, film-makers, and even something about the economic conditions under which the Italian film industry has had to struggle. His bibliography, though compact, is well-chosen and includes important recent works in Italian. Bondanella is well-informed, and he provides a stock of opinions which, though not particularly original, give a reasonable critical account of the canon of classic and near-classic films of the last forty years. The last chapters perform the particularly useful function of discussing figures who (whether one likes it or not) need greater attention than is usually devoted to them in Anglo-American film scholarship: Sergio Leone (though I'm not sure he deserves an entire chapter), Ettore Scola, Marco Ferreri, Franco Brusati, Francesco Rosi, Giuliano Montaldo, Elio Petri, Liliana Cavani. And one feels grateful to learn something about newcomers like Maurizio Nichetti, Nanni Moretti, Carlo Verdone, Massimo Troisi, Salvatore Piscicelli, Valentino Orsini, Marco

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Beyond the informational level, however, Bondanella's book leaves something to be desired. Though everything, including comedies, gets related to politics and ideology, the discussion seem perfunctory and pro forma—the reader is made to assume precisely what he should be told about the intricacies of Italian political and philosophical thinking. Anyone seeking a genuine historical explanation for the efflorescence of the Italian cinema after the war is likely to be disappointed. The book, in a way, is better for the reader who hasn't seen most of the films than for the one who has and who wants to know how they got to be as good as they are. In other words, the book works best as a kind of program guide. Not that Bondanella misrepresents any of the films that he describes, or that he is given to eccentric opinions: indeed, his corrections of American opinion are often valuable, as in his defense of the *Night Porter,* a film that was much better than its American reception would have led one to believe. (He also does justice to Lina Wertmüller, who has been foolishly accused of endorsing the very attitudes which she so obviously satirizes.) It is just that the scope of Bondanella's book forces him at times to be sketchy—not always, but too often. One can feel sympathetic with his plight: he doubtless was under considerable pressure to keep the book as short as possible, and he had to choose what kind of information he should provide.

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—SEYMOUR CHATMAN

CINEMA HISTORIES, CINEMA PRACTICES

Patricia Mellencamp and Philip Rosen, eds. Los Angeles: The American Film Institute Monograph Series V. IV, 1984.

USC's Center for the Humanities sponsored an Asilomar meeting in Spring 1981, sixth in a series of film theory discussions; five met previously at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee. With a companion AFI Monograph volume titled *Re-vision: Essays in Feminist Film Criticism,* this collection embraces the essays presented at the conference, sometimes revised for publication. Papers originally met prepared responses, but these were not included, nor were participations, sometimes acerbic, on the part of invited guests who included Gerald Mast and Garth Jowett. What results is a series of thoughtful, academic presentations often commonly motivated, less frequently methodologically compatible. Participants include Edward Buscombe, Michael Silverman, Thomas Elsaesser, Edward Branigan, Manuel De Landa, Peter Lehman, Maureen Turim, Andrew Tyndall and Philip Rosen, one of the book's editors.

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By and large, writers who center on historical matters are disinclined to deal with particular film texts except as these support an argumentative thrust. Thus for Buscombe *Our Daily Bread* becomes a basis to measure how, if at all, Hollywood's system defined its products in terms of capitalist ownership or, motivated by lusts for immediate profit, might absorb a film whose ideological import was (perhaps) contrary to capitalist interests. Rosen considers *Birth of a Nation* and *The Roaring Twenties* as evidence of a narrative discourse respecting history, i.e., a nineteenth-century interpretive vision that guaranteed ideological wisdom through mimetic example.

One might make a case that strategies of the same order are afoot in *Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices,* that film texts articulate ways to discuss social, political, philosophical and psychological matters, but it would be more accurate simply to acknowledge that this conference, like much film study, abandons esthetic adjudications. As speakers are wont to say, film history is hardly a history of films.

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> What this suggests for film history is neither that we abandon the concepts we have, on the grounds that the facts are too complicated, nor that we assume that they have already answered our problems. To say that economics determines ideology is at once obvious and useless. The question is, how precisely? To answer it, we need both more theory (adequate, for example, to do more than tell us that a certain film is "capitalist ideology") and more evidence . . . —Buscombe (p. 14)

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> It all points to the idea that pleasure is itself a composite, something that only makes sense in relation to other terms and thus not an ultimate determinant, a first cause. Pleasure, as it is bound up with signification, representation, meaning, perception and memory, is therefore perforce implicated in history as the shifting and fixing of the relationships between desire and representation, which can be specified even if the question of how these relationships are articulated in the cinema via aural and visual perception is extremely complex.
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On review, one is frustrated by the extent to which a writer's commitment operates outside others' frames of reference, sometimes of their seeming pleasures. Issues rarely join. The book's only open confrontation surfaces in Lehman's essay, which questions avant-garde cultural presumptions held by structuralist-materialist spokesmen Peter Gidal and by Stephen Heath and Malcolm Le Grice as well as their confidences about how films are, in fact, perceived.

Perhaps it is most useful to read *Cinema Histories, Cinema Practices* as the writers read films: documentation of how a variety of philosophic, linguistic, psychological and structural factors conjoin in academia at a particular moment in time. Under these circumstances, the presence or absence of agreement is equally significant, and the collection becomes a series of tentative, candid, sophisticated efforts to impose dispositions of current theory on some of the simplistic excesses of film history. A thoughtful reader will find time well spent. —JOHN FELL

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FILM: Form & Feeling

by Dennis DeNitto

CITY COLLEGE, CUNY

Designed as a primary or supplementary text for the first course in film (foundations of film, history and theory of film, film genres), *Film: Form & Feeling* embraces in one volume introductory material on practically every aspect of cinema studies.

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The stills in this volume are, with a few exceptions, frame enlargements drawn from the author's own collection. Many of them have never before appeared in print. In Part Two he features a series of smaller photographs, rather than larger but less useful individual stills, that illustrates the action of scenes analyzed in the text. And instead of including a separate glossary that would repeat particularly the definitions in the pages devoted to "camera-editing dynamics" (which conclude with a categorized listing of terms), the author has compiled a list of technical terms.

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